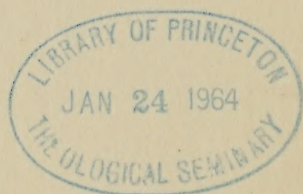


The GOLDEN
PARABLE

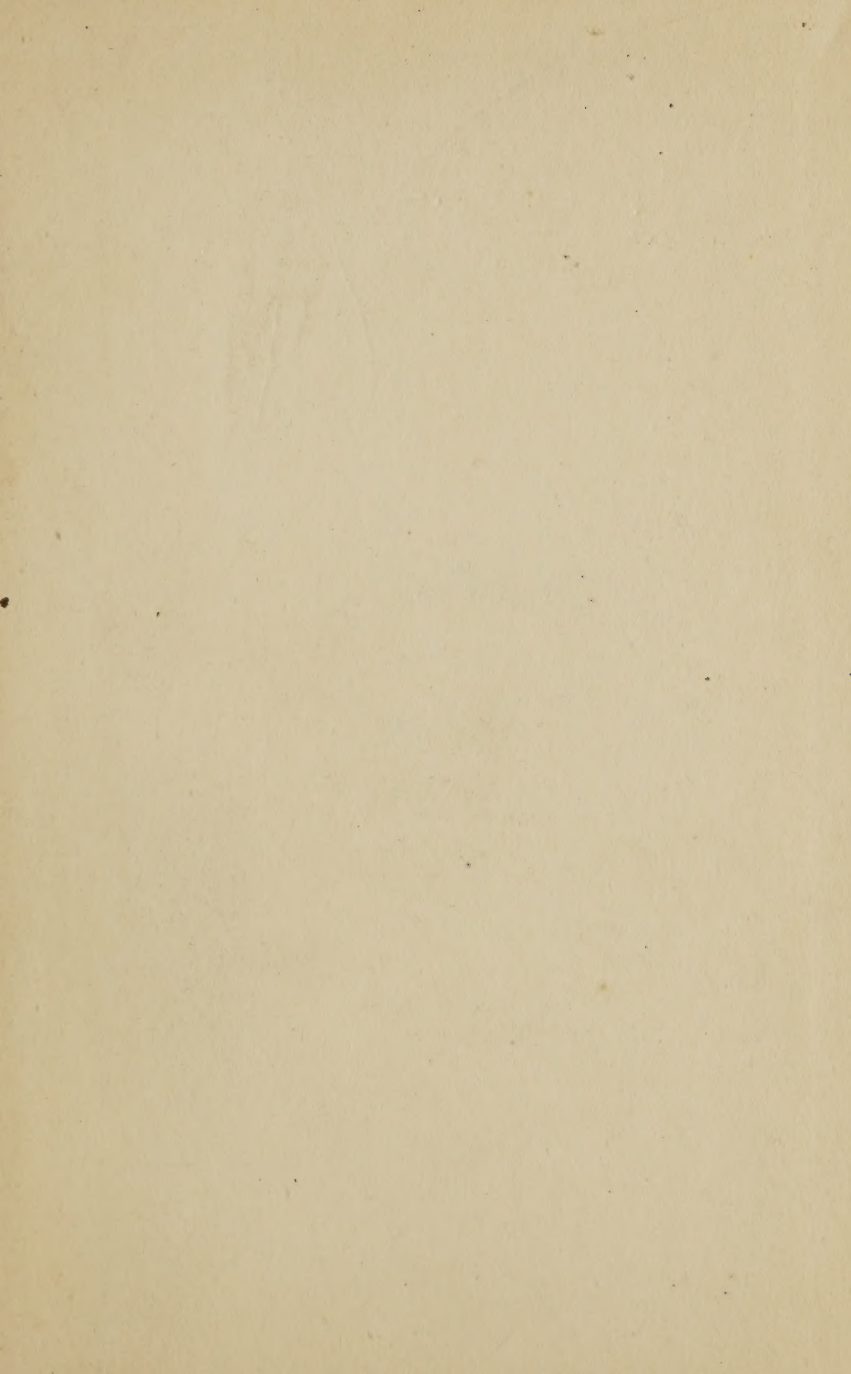


David James Burrell



BS2418

.B969





THE GOLDEN PARABLE

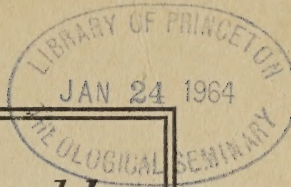
DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D. D.

The Golden Parable Cloth, \$1.25

The Laughter of God Cloth, \$1.25
And Other Sermons

Why I Believe the Bible Cloth, \$1.25

The Sermon Cloth, \$2.00
Its Construction and Delivery



The Golden Parable

Studies in the Story of the Prodigal Son

✓ By

DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D.D. LL. D.

*Author of "The Laughter of God," "Why
I Believe the Bible," "The Sermon: Its
Construction and Delivery," etc.*



New York Chicago
Fleming H. Revell Company
London and Edinburgh

Copyright, MCMXXVI, by
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 17 North Wabash Ave.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 75 Princes Street

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

AND he said, *A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.*

And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

And when he came to himself he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.

And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him,

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him.

And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house he heard musick and dancing.

And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out and entreated him.

And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends:

But as soon as this thy son was come, which

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine.

It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

—LUKE 15: 11-32.

Contents

FOREWORD—THE WONDERFUL TEACHER	-	-	-	-	11
I. THE FATHER	-	-	-	-	25
II. THE “LIVING”	-	-	-	-	37
III. THE YOUNGER SON	-	-	-	-	51
IV. IN THE FAR COUNTRY	-	-	-	-	63
V. AT HIS WITS’ END	-	-	-	-	75
VI. RIGHT ABOUT FACE	-	-	-	-	89
VII. A GOOD RESOLUTION	-	-	-	-	99
VIII. A POOR PRAYER	-	-	-	-	109
IX. THE LOVE THAT WILL NOT LET US GO	-	-	-	-	119
X. “GRACE ABOUNDING”	-	-	-	-	129
XI. JOY IN HEAVEN	-	-	-	-	139
XII. THE ELDER SON	-	-	-	-	149

FOREWORD

*“ He spake many things unto them in parables,
saying,—”*—MATT. 13: 3.

THE WONDERFUL TEACHER

THE scribes and Pharisees were amazed and bewildered by the sudden appearance of Jesus of Nazareth as a religious teacher. Who was this upstart, that He should presume to poach upon a reservation which had been theirs from time immemorial? A carpenter, whose father and mother they knew! "Whence," they indignantly asked, "hath this man letters?" Whence, indeed, save in the sordid environment of a workshop with chips and shavings about His feet? Yet the silly, hoodwinked people thronged to hear Him!

It was obvious that something must be done to stay His ever-increasing influence. By order of the Sanhedrin a detachment of the Temple Guard was sent to arrest Him. They found Him, with the people gathered about Him, in Solomon's porch; and, pausing to listen, they returned without their prisoner. What had they to say for themselves? Never did any *posse comitatus* present so strange a report. In answer to the question, "Why have ye not brought Him?" they had nothing to say but "Never man spake like this man!"

The world has ever since been echoing that

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

verdict. Here was an unknown man who, in His early thirties, emerged in homespun from an inconspicuous home and, as an itinerant preacher, without prestige, or patronage, or the humblest sort of diploma, lifted up His voice against the united wisdom of His time; a voice that, coming down through the centuries, has supplanted the learning of all the rabbinical and philosophical schools and is heard in the forefront of every movement in behalf of progress throughout the world. When all other miracles have been disposed of, this is one that still remains to be accounted for. Results do not happen without causes.

This singular Teacher left on record fewer words than the average country minister of to-day, but every utterance was freighted with significance. "Burning thoughts in breathing words!" He wasted no rhetoric on non-essentials, but boldly touched on all the great spiritual problems with which men are hopelessly wont to grapple and, at His touch, the Gordian knots were loosed.

It was thus that Jesus spoke, His enemies themselves being witnesses. One of the remarkable facts of history is that the most glowing tributes to His wisdom have come, not from His avowed followers but from those who, by a singular infatuation of sciolism, have denied His superhuman claims. Such men as Josephus the Jew, Julian the

THE WONDERFUL TEACHER

Apostate and Celsus the satirist frankly recognized the transcendent merit of His teaching.

Listen to Spinoza, the father of modern pantheism: "Christ was indeed the temple of God, since God has most fully revealed Himself in Him."

Listen to Rousseau the infidel: "What sweetness, what purity in the manner of Christ! What an affecting gracefulness in His didactics! What sublimity in His maxims! What profound wisdom in His discourses! What presence of mind, what subtlety, what fitness in His replies! How great His command over His passions!"

Listen to David Strauss, the leader of a radical movement of the nineteenth century which, probably, did more than any other to plunge Europe into the World War: "In Jesus the union of self-consciousness with the consciousness of God was real, and expressed, not only verbally but actually, in all the conditions of His life. He represented within the religious sphere the highest point, beyond which posterity cannot go; yea, which it cannot even equal, inasmuch as every one who hereafter should climb the same height could only do this with the help of Jesus who first attained it."

Listen to Renan, the author of the sacrilegious *Vie de Jesu*: "The moral teaching of Jesus is the highest that has emanated from the human conscience, the most beautiful that any moralist has ever traced. Whatever may be the surprises of the

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

future, this Jesus will never be surpassed. His worship will grow young without ceasing; His legend will call forth tears without end; His sufferings will melt the noblest hearts: all ages will proclaim that among the children of men there is none born greater than Jesus."

Listen to Theodore Parker: "This man, ridiculed for His lack of knowledge in a nation of hypocritical priests and corrupt people, falls back on simple morality and religion. He unites in Himself the sublimest precepts and divinest practices, thus more than realizing the dream of prophets and sages. He rises free from all the prejudice of His age, nation or sect; gives free range to the Spirit of God in His breast; sets apart the law, sacred and time-honored as it was, its forms, its sacrifice, its temple and its priests; puts away the doctors of the law, subtle, learned, irrefragable; and pours out a doctrine beautiful as the light, sublime as heaven and true as God."

How shall this be accounted for? What was it in the teaching of Jesus that has called forth not only the enthusiastic devotion of His disciples but such glowing tributes of praise from His avowed enemies all along the ages? A peasant with no influential retinue; His pulpit the green hillside or a fishing boat moored to the margin of an inland lake; His auditorium no imposing cathedral or lecture-hall but the blue canopy of the overarching

THE WONDERFUL TEACHER

skies; His audience the procession of the ages. What was the secret of His power? This preacher never spoke to empty pews. "The common people heard him gladly." Rabbis and philosophers turned their backs upon Him, as they are still disposed to do, but the people—"the common people"—see how to-day as ever they come trooping after Him!

AUTHORITY

It is written that those who heard Him "were amazed, for he taught them *as one having authority* and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7: 29). The word here rendered "authority" is *exousia*, and it designates an inward source. Our Lord taught not as the scribes, who referred for their authority to other teachers, but as one who could say, "I am the Truth." He taught, not like the prophets, who introduced their discourses with "Thus saith the Lord," since He and the Father were in such complete harmony that Their word was one. Wherefore He spake on this wise: "Verily, verily, I say unto you." How bold is this manifesto! Who is this that sets his *ipse dixit* against precedent, tradition, the teaching of all ancient worthies? How this "I say unto you" goes crashing through the elaborate systems set up by former courts and councils! Here is a tone of authority which finds no parallel except in the

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

thunders of Sinai. No other preacher dogmatizes in this manner. He who presumes to say:

*"I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips let no dog bark!"*

is laughed at. Yet Christ preaches, and is preached, with a "Verily, verily." This verily leaves no room for guesses or speculations; it is final, complete, conclusive. We are admonished against adding to it or subtracting from it. Our coign of vantage is here: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said unto you."

SIMPLICITY

Observe, moreover, the extreme *simplicity* of His teaching. He advanced no abstruse propositions, used no sesquipedalian phrases. He made no reference to philosophy or science as such, though His teachings challenge all philosophic and scientific tests. He spoke to plain people, addressing Himself to their common sense. His word was like an ocean, on whose shore philosophers stand and gaze afar with wonder, while children sport in its waters about their feet.

One day He took a little child upon His knee and admonished His hearers that unless their attitude toward truth was as humble and receptive as that of childhood, they should in no wise enter the kingdom of truth, which is the kingdom of God.

THE WONDERFUL TEACHER

No man in His audience ever knit his brows and wondered what the preacher was aiming at: for the word of Jesus had an incomparable directness, so that every hearer was moved to say, "That means me."

PICTURESQUENESS

It is safe to say that many a professor of philosophy and ethics in our leading universities—not to mention an occasional minister—would consider it beneath his dignity to use such object lessons as Jesus habitually employed in making clear the sublimest verities. He threw His doctrine into bold relief by reference to anything whatever that would serve His purpose in nature and common life, finding

*"Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks.
Sermons in stones. . . ."*

Would He teach providence? "Consider the lilies of the field." The final judgment? "As a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats." Heaven? "In my Father's house are many mansions." The kingdom on earth? "As a grain of mustard seed." Personal influence? Salt; a candle on a candlestick; "a city set on a hill which cannot be hid." Thus the profoundest truths were brought within the comprehension of simple minds.

In the brief record of His teaching we find no

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

less than thirty-nine parables, together with constantly recurring metaphors and other figures of speech. When His disciples asked Him why He thus spake to the multitude, His answer was, "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven but unto them it is not given." And He went on to explain, "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of *Esaias*, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

THE INNERMOST PLACE

By this we are given to understand that while the Temple of Truth is open to sincere truth-seekers it is closed to those who are wise in their

THE WONDERFUL TEACHER

own conceit. "I thank thee, Father," said Jesus on one occasion, "because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11: 25).

OPEN SESAME!

It thus appears that the key to "the mysteries of the kingdom" is faith; which is elsewhere defined as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." In the province of the unseen and eternal, seeing is not believing. On the contrary, "blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed" (John 15: 29; cf. 1 Peter 1: 8).

The root of unbelief is intellectual pride. The wisdom of the wisest is but a little at best; "a little learning is a dangerous thing." There is more hope for an abecedarian than for those whose eyes are lofty and whose eyelids are lifted up with the boast, "We are the scholars and wisdom will die with us."

In this connection, the difference between a man and a sheep is that the latter has five physical senses while the former has, in addition to these, a sixth or spiritual sense by which he is enabled to apprehend spiritual things. It is by faith, that is, by the exercise of this sixth sense, that we accept "the evidence of things not seen," and are thus enabled to think God's thoughts after Him.

To demand the evidence of the physical senses

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

in proof of the great spiritual verities which lie within the purview of this sixth sense, is as preposterous as it would be to insist on seeing with one's ears or hearing with one's eyes. God and immortality are not demonstrable as scientific facts.

So it comes to pass that "not many wise men after the flesh are called." In their intellectual pride, puffed up with a little learning in the province of material things, they refuse to accept by faith the evidence of things that lie beyond the horizon of the surrounding hills in the boundless universe of the unseen and eternal.

And since men, by virtue of their creation in the divine likeness, are equipped with sovereign wills, they can do as they please in these premises.

*"Though God be good and free be heaven,
No force divine can love compel."*

Where there is room for faith, there must of necessity be room for unfaith. The simpler truth is made by the great Teacher, the more certainly do sciolists reject it. And meanwhile the futile quest goes on. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" No, never by searching like blind men feeling their way along the wall; but yes, certainly, by sitting in a reasonable, receptive attitude at the feet of Him who said, "I am the truth; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

THE WONDERFUL TEACHER

"MILK FOR BABES"

Hence the parabolic teaching of Jesus. "Then said he to his disciples, Will ye also go away?" That is, "Will ye choose the bewildering mazes of speculation in preference to the simplicity of truth?" And they answered, "To whom, Lord, shall we go?" To whom, indeed? To the rabbis with their wire-drawn jots and tittles of decimated truth? Or to the philosophic schools by the Ilissus? Nay, Lord; "Thou only hast the words of eternal life."

And Solomon said, "Go to; I will prove thee with wisdom: I will search and find out the reason of things. . . . And behold this also is vanity and vexation of spirit. . . . The wind whirl-eth about and returneth again to its circuits and all the rivers run into the sea. . . . Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and to keep his commandments is the whole¹ of man."

¹ This is as it is in the original.

I
THE FATHER

"And he said, A certain man had two sons."

—LUKE 15: 11.

I

THE FATHER

THE parable of The Prodigal Son is called The Golden Parable because it is the crown-jewel of them all. Its gold is as the gold of Havilah, of which, if a man be once possessed, he shall forevermore be rich toward God. In it the wonderful Teacher proposes to unveil the love of our heavenly Father, the love that passeth knowledge, the love that will not let us go.

It tells the simple story of a wayward boy who left his father's house and, after a reckless fling in a far country, returned in rags and tatters to find a welcome awaiting him.

The setting forth of God within the narrow dimensions of "a certain man" is not, as would appear, after the manner of the ancient Greeks who, in their desire to bring humanity and divinity into mutual touch, equipped the Olympiad with the common frailties of mortal men. As the Father is here portrayed in human guise his moral perfections are unimpaired; the manifest end in view being to bring God down to men only that men may be brought up to Him.

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

The Teacher knew God as no other could; for He had been one with Him from all eternity; and His purpose in coming into the world was to reveal the glory and grace and truth of the Father to the children of men (John 1: 1-14).

He was Himself an only begotten Son. The "certain man" in the parable had two sons, both of whom were bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; but our heavenly Father has one begotten Son and only one.

The first recorded words of His earthly life were these: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" His last words on the Cross were: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." And the substance of all His teaching in between is set forth in the saying, "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1: 18).

In His instructions as to prayer, which is our appointed medium of communication with God, He said to His disciples, "When ye pray say, Our Father." But not every one can say this. The filial spirit is the ultimate test and touchstone of godliness. There are not a few current mistakes as to the divine fatherhood, some of which are as old as Malachi who remonstrated with certain sentimentalists of his time, saying, "The burden of the Lord to Israel: If then I be a father, where is mine honour?" (Mal. 1: 6).

THE FATHER

THE ONLY BEGOTTEN

It is a singular fact that in the Old Testament there is not one reference to God as the Father of generic man. It is another singular fact that in the teachings of the New Testament there is not one reference to Christ as sustaining the same relation to the Father that we do. He never says "Our Father" in such a way as to include Himself in the same category with His disciples. In teaching them how to pray He said, "When ye pray, (not when we pray) say, Our Father." To Mary of Magdala He said, "Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto *my* Father and *your* Father." Here, as elsewhere, observe His careful avoidance of the phrase "Our Father" as His own. Why? Because He was the only begotten Son, begotten of God by an "eternal generation," as the early theologians used to put it, and so begotten as to seal His co-equality with the Father. It is obvious that no mortal man could share that singular relation with Him.

This peculiar filiation with God is emphasized consistently all through the teaching of Jesus: as when Philip said to Him, "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us," and He answered, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father! How sayest thou then, Shew

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me?" (John 14: 8-10). And again, "I and my Father are one" (John 10: 20).

By this we are given to understand that, in Christ, we have not only an unveiling of the Father, but a verification of the incomprehensible mystery of the substantial unity of the persons of the Father and His Son. In view of this fact it is clear that no true Christian can hold, as some say, that Christ's divinity is merely the sort of "divinity" which is claimed for other great men, or that His Sonship was "not essentially different from ours," that is, from the "divinity" claimed for all humanity by virtue of its creation in the likeness of God.

It is a mistake to assume that God is our Father by reason of His having thus created us: for we are simply creatures of His hand. To be sure, man is His masterpiece, made in His own image and after His likeness, breathing His breath and given dominion over all the lower orders of life (Gen. 1: 26-28). Nevertheless, God did not beget man but created him. "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten thee" (Heb. 5: 5).

We may, in a figure and by a stretch of the imagination, think of men generically as bearing a

THE FATHER

filial relation with God, as the Greek poet Aratus did (Acts 7: 28) or as General Foch was wont to address his troops as "My children," or as a sculptor speaks of his masterpieces as the "children of his brain." But the fact remains that man by nature is as really a creature as is the vessel made upon a potter's wheel (Jer. 18: 6; cf. Rom. 9: 21).

CHILDREN BY ADOPTION

It was our hopelessness in sin that moved the only begotten Son to come into the world and become obedient unto death for us men and our salvation: and it is solely through Him, as "the first born of many brethren," that we are received by adoption into the family of God. The members of that family are "a great multitude which no man can number," who in heaven ascribe perpetual praise to the Lamb who has redeemed them; *plus* a great number of believers in Christ who are still on earth. These together constitute the great family or invisible Church of God.

All these are God's children by adoption in Christ: as it is written, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not; but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name" (John 1: 11-12).

There are many who profess to be in this family who are not really so. Profession is one thing;

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

faith in Christ as the living Mediator between sinful men and a holy God is a totally different thing. "Many shall say in that day, Lord, Lord, and he from within shall answer, Depart, I never knew you" (Matt. 25: 12, 41).

Meanwhile, "the Lord knoweth them that are his." He only can distinguish between church-members who merely go through the motions of piety—like artificial members of the body,—and those who are so truly members of the body of Christ that His life animates them in heart and conscience, and mind and will; making Him their very Alpha and Omega, the beginning of every hope and end of every purpose; "first, last, midst and all in all."

Here is the supreme manifestation of divine grace. "Behold," exclaims the aged John, "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" (John 3: 1). It is related that a heathen convert, engaged in translating the Scriptures into his native tongue, on coming upon this passage, was so overcome that he fell upon his knees with the cry, "Nay, Lord, let me only be permitted to kiss thy feet!" The evangelist, however, does not pause there but goes straight on to announce a great surprise in store for true believers: "Beloved, now are we sons of God, and *it doth not yet appear what we shall be*: but we know that, when he shall

THE FATHER

appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3: 2).

Dream on, O faithful follower of Christ; dream of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God; of the morning star and the hidden manna, of the white stone with a new name written therein which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it; of white raiment and an incorruptible crown that fadeth not away! Mysteries all and only to be apprehended by faith! Dream on, beloved; and wonder. But know this that in the great day of awaking not only will your fondest dream come true but it will be seen that the half was never told!

Oh, the length and breadth and depth and height of the Father's love thus manifest in the adoption of sinful men into His holy family, on the sole condition of a living faith in His only begotten and well beloved Son! Mayhap it was this that moved an unknown versifier to sing:

*"Could we with ink the ocean fill,
Were the whole world of parchment made;
Were every several stick a quill
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God alone
Would drain that ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky!"*

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

The agent in thus bringing sinners into God's family is the Holy Spirit, who is therefore called "the Spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8: 15).

In the farewell interview of Jesus with His disciples He said, "I will send unto you from the Father the Spirit of truth; he shall testify of me" (John 16: 7-9). It thus appears that when the only begotten Son had finished His redemptive work on earth, the administration of subsequent affairs was in a sense passed over to the Holy Spirit, whose special official function is to urge the claims of the Gospel upon men.

Christ once accepted, the Holy Spirit becomes the Spirit of Adoption; as it is written, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

OUR FATHER

It appears, then, that the Christian life begins when one can truly say "Abba, Father." Here lies the secret of successful prayer, as Jesus said,

THE FATHER

“If ye shall ask anything of the Father in my name he shall give it you” (John 15:16), the fact being that one who is really in filiation with God cannot insist upon anything that is not according to God’s holy will.

It was a great thing that Jesus said to His disciples, when they asked Him how to pray: “When ye pray say, Our Father.” But can we say it? All the felicities of highest heaven are in it.

I have heard of an old preacher, who arose in his pulpit one Sunday morning and announced his text as Luke 15: 18, and began to read, “I will arise and go unto ——” and just there fell into a swoon from which he awoke among the saints in glory. Think with what transport he must have uttered the next words—“My Father”—in heaven!

The well-beloved Son came all the way from His ineffable glory to teach sinners how to say those two words; but if we would say them worthily when we reach the Father’s house, we must be practicing them worthily here and now.

II
THE "LIVING"

*"And the younger of them said to his father,
Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth
to me. And he divided unto them his living."*

—LUKE 15: 12.

II

THE "LIVING"

GOD is behind everything in this world of ours. No force works automatically; life least of all. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." If my pulse could beat once only of itself it would disprove the being of God.

PROVIDENCE

And by the same token, everything that has to do with life is a part of the "living" which we have in and from Him. We emphasize that fact every time we say, "Give us this day our daily bread." When the Israelites saw manna lying on the ground "plenteous as hoarfrost" they did not know what it was,¹ but they knew well enough where it came from. The manna was miraculous, but no more so than our daily bread.

We speak of the graveyard as "God's acre"; but every field that a farmer tills is "God's acre," too. Behold the never-ceasing Miracle of the Loaves! Not a grain of wheat would ever survive its burial were it not that the Lord of the Resurrection takes care of it. He subsidizes all

¹ The etymological definition of the word *man-hu* is, "What is it?"

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

the forces of air and earth and the waters under the earth to provide our living for us.

PROVIDENCE IMPARTIAL

And this is done without reference to any merit of ours. "He maketh it to rain upon the just and the unjust." Those who are as barren of fruitage as "the wilderness and the solitary place" are nevertheless the recipients of His perpetual bounty. The Bolsheviki of Russia have formally renounced God; but their consistency is a pinch-beck jewel. What would have become of them shut up as they were like Elijah in the ravine of Cherith, but for the ravens of relief that brought them cargoes of breadstuffs, as agents of the loving God?

PROVIDENTIAL OBLIGATIONS

The first suggestion of Providence is gratitude. "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!" As far as we are informed the Younger son, on receiving his portion of his father's goods, was not moved to acknowledge his obligation in any way. He simply took his portion and went whistling away to the far country. There are people nowadays who "rob God" in the same way (Mal. 3: 8).

If I give a beggar a penny I expect him to say "Thank you." If I throw a bone to a dog he

THE "LIVING"

will lick my hand. What shall be said then of a man who subsists every moment of every day on God's bounty with never a word of acknowledgment?

*"For what are men better than sheep or goats—
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer?"*

My friend, have you prayed to-day? Think what a fatuously unreasonable thing it is, not to be on speaking terms with God!

The second suggestion of Providence is loyalty. It is not likely that the Younger son would have swung away from his home so jauntily, with his "portion of goods" in hand, but for some feeling of resentment against the restraints of parental authority. Perhaps, all things considered, it was just as well that he should go. When a boy—or a man—begins to complain against "the blue laws," and to hanker for freedom to "carry on" according to his own sweet will, nothing can cure him so surely and thoroughly as a season of expatriation.

It is a true saying: "Blessings brighten as they take their flight." If the people who find fault with Providence were allowed to shift for themselves for, say, a small fraction of a single day, they would begin to realize that there's no place like home and no comfort like a Father's care.

Meanwhile, it behooves those who believe in God to show their faith by obedience to His righteous laws and by a cordial acquiescence in His beneficent plans and purposes concerning them.

One of the classics of American literature is the pathetic story *The Man Without a Country*. What poignant memories! What vain regrets! It is related of Benedict Arnold that, after years of exile spent in the vain endeavor to live down the memory of his treason, in his last delirium called for the uniform which he had worn in the service of his country and died with his hand upon the sword that had once wrought valiantly for his early faith.

It is the extreme of folly to neglect God for a lifetime in the hope of making amends by a death-bed repentance. In a long ministry of more than half a century I have never attended a dying sinner who did not express sorrow for his sins and cling desperately to the forlorn hope of pardon. There is indeed no limit to Divine grace, insomuch that "betwixt the saddle and the ground, mercy sought is mercy found;" but what a contemptible thing it is to serve consistently with the enemy for years until confronted by sudden danger and then, in the last extremity, like Joab, to seek refuge at the horns of the altar! It puts a severe strain on one's broadest conception of the divine Fatherhood—relieved only by the story of the penitent thief—to

imagine one burning out the candle of life in the service of self, in the fond expectation of flinging the charred wick, at the last moment, as an acceptable offering in the face of God.

But such complete forgetfulness of divine Providence is not the only offense against it. Fault-finding is another and, even among professed Christians, not an uncommon one. Not long ago, a woman whom I had known for years as a devout follower of Christ, overwhelmed by sudden bereavement, refused to be comforted. "How can I pray," she said, "to the cruel God who has taken away my only son, the light of my eyes?" Rebellion! Rank rebellion, not only against God but against reason, against the ordinance of nature, against death as the gateway of life, against the hope of the great home-bringing! God is not "an hard man" but a loving Father who makes all things, death included, "work together for good to them that love him."

Our present life is but an infinitesimal arc of an infinite circle. This is the very center of our Christian faith. What matters it how the Father's "living" is dispensed to his children in this momentary life when an immortality of immeasurable æons of felicity is before us? Millionaire or mendicant, what matters it? *In Christ ye ben fylléd.*¹ "If Christ is yours all things are yours,

¹This is Wycliffe's rendering of "In Him ye are complete."

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

things present, things to come, life, death, all things are yours; for ye are Christ's and Christ is God's."

The discontent of the people is most largely due to poverty; and as a rule the blame of poverty is laid everywhere but where it belongs.

*"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."*

But suppose it were rightly attributed to the unequal distribution of God's "living"? Riches and penury alike have their compensations. The Christian key to "competence" is in the philosophy of Paul, who maintained his religion at the cost of his patrimony: "For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4: 11-13).

It is natural to find fault with the apparent partiality of the Father in the distribution of His goods; just here is where Christian philosophy and Nature seem at odds. The children of Israel forgot the Hand that had delivered them from bondage when they found themselves shut up in the wilderness. Their daily dole of manna palled on them when they remembered the flesh-pots of

THE "LIVING"

Egypt. They forgot their hard taskmasters, the whip of scorpions, the impossible tale of bricks without straw, and murmured against God. Blame them? No, blame the perverse disposition of all human kind, even of such as have been called out of darkness into Gospel light. Strange that the God of Providence should so patiently bear with us!

The third suggestion of Providence is coöperation. If the Younger son had been accustomed to address himself to the business of the farm he would have found little or no leisure for reckless dreams. "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

The prodigals of the world are recruited from the ranks of its parasites: and for a like reason the reproaches that lie against the Church are invariably traceable to such of its members as, content with the meager hope of a personal salvation, stand idle in the market-place with folded hands.

*"There is a number of us creep¹
Into this world to eat and sleep,
And know no reason why we're born
But only to consume the corn,
Devour the cattle, flesh, and fish
And leave behind an empty dish;*

¹ This was written by Isaac Watts. It cannot be found, however, in "Watts and Select" or any other of our Hymn Books; possibly because no tune sufficiently melancholy could be found for it.

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

*And if our tombstones, when we die,
Ben't taught to flatter and to lie,
There's nothing better can be said
Than that he's eat up all his bread,
Drunk up his drink and gone to bed."*

A professing Christian should of all men be most foremost in recognizing the obligations which are involved in Divine providence. Great is his portion of the Father's goods. For in addition to what are called "the common gifts of Providence" he has "the unspeakable gift" of a special Providence, to wit, salvation in Christ. What shall we render unto the Father for this Kohinoor out of His casket? The calves of our lips? Loyalty to His holy law? Aye, more; the unceasing tribute of coöperation with Him in the reaping and ingathering of His harvests. Nothing, nothing is too good for Him! What shall we say then to these things?

*"I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
Over mountain and plain and sea;
I'll do what you want me to do, dear Lord,
I'll be what you want me to be."*

The appointed agency for the conversion of the world to truth and righteousness, by means of the coöperation of God's people, is the Church. By this is sometimes meant the visible Church, made up of all sorts of people professing to be Chris-

THE "LIVING"

tians; at other times, a church within the visible Church, made up of true believers in God, as manifest in Christ "the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world."

The visible Church is set forth by Christ Himself in His parable of the Wheat and the Tares, where He says "The wheat and the tares must grow together until the harvest" (Matt. 13: 24-30). The invisible Church is designated by Christ where, in pursuance of the good confession of Peter, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God," he said, "On this rock will I build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16: 18).

Obviously, it is easy to find fault with the Church visible; not only because it is constituted of all kinds, good, bad and indifferent, received in the necessity of the case on their own recognizance, but because even among sincere professors "there is none perfect, no not one." A true Christian does not profess to be perfect but to be earnestly striving after perfection as he finds it in "the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ." He counts not himself "to have apprehended, as though he were already perfect," but reaches forth toward "the prize of this high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Meanwhile the murmuring of the outside world against the inconsistencies of avowed Christians

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

goes on: "We have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented, we have piped unto you and ye have not danced; . . . *but wisdom is justified of her children*" (Luke 7: 31-35). That is to say, notwithstanding all the imperfections of church members, the Church has ever been and continues to be the one only living organism through which God works visibly, continuously and irresistibly for the betterment of the world and the bringing in of the Golden Age when all men shall know the Lord as the God of salvation and every knee shall bow before Him.

This being so, it is the clear duty of every right-thinking man to get into organic connection with the Christian Church if he would be known as a "laborer together with God." So much, at least, devolves upon him in recognition of the "share of the Father's goods which falleth to him."

Once having sincerely made his "profession of faith," nothing remains for you and me but to "make our calling and election sure" by living as becomes living "members of the body of Christ," so assuring our place in the invisible Church whose members' names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

To this end it becomes all "members of the Church in good and regular standing" to get busy in the work of the Kingdom. A name on an ecclesiastical roster is good as far as it goes; but

THE "LIVING"

there are drones in every hive. "As the Father hath sent me into the world, to seek and to save," said Jesus to His disciples, "so send I you." Thus is marked out clearly the evolution of a Christian from a mere beneficiary of the divine bounty into a laborer together with God.

III
THE YOUNGER SON

"And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey."

—LUKE 15: 13.

III

THE YOUNGER SON

IT is no hard matter to bring this melodrama up to date. A farmer's boy shut up in a valley between the hills, hears the call of the world beyond and, like a caged bird, beats his wings against the limitations of his narrow life. Up in the morning early to do his monotonous round of chores; plowing, harrowing, seed-sowing, ingathering, day in and day out, year in and year out; what sort of a life is this for an ambitious youth? The land of adventure calls him. It is "the call of the wild." He dreams of jostling streets and banquet halls and no end of pleasures for those who will. He must away!

"A BOY'S WILL IS THE WIND'S WILL"

Lot heard the call, as he dwelt in the well-watered valley of the Jordan; and, though he knew it was the voice of graceless Sodom, he arose and pitched his tent toward the city.

David heard it as he watched his father's flocks in the pastures near Bethlehem: and the fortunes of his whole life turned on the moment when, tightening his girdle, he said, "I must arise and go!"

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

In the old-fashioned "debating societies" of our boyhood we used to discuss the question, "Which is preferable, city or country life?" and as the result of our flamboyant oratory we always arrived at the conclusion that life in contact with the sweet influences of Nature was preferable because, as Cowper wrote, "God made the country and man made the town." And then as we grew older and opportunity offered, we gathered our belongings in a handkerchief, like Joseph in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and followed the well-beaten path to town. What wonder? The city is the world's main artery and in the logic of events the farms and villages are its tributaries. "All the rivers run into the sea."

LEAVING HOME

It is an old, old story. The years may come and go, but I shall never forget my last morning in the old frontier home: the family prayer in the sitting-room; the cowskin trunk tagged for "Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass.;" the farewell of brothers and sisters; the tremulous words of my father, "God bless you, son;" the two hands of mother on my shoulders, her kiss on either cheek and the dew on her eyelashes; the Book she gave me at the gate with "The entrance of thy Word giveth light" written on the fly-leaf; the sad attempt at fortitude as I mounted the stage with one last

THE YOUNGER SON

backward look through misty eyes. Oh, it seems but yesterday. Good-bye!

*“ But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.”*

It is the course of nature. I watched a brood of sparrows as they grew from a mere group of hungry mouths, red-edged and yellow, until the call of the wildwood came and one by one they perched on the edge of the nest, spread their wings and went twittering forth into life. So do men and nations also. Blessings on the old home! But its limitations are narrow and parental authority is likely to irk the growing youth even as he declares:

*“ My name is Norval: on the Grampian hills
My father feeds his flocks; a frugal swain,
Whose constant cares were to increase his store,
And keep his only son, myself, at home.”*

Yet it is written of the Best of men that He “increased in wisdom and stature, and was subject” unto His parents (Luke 2: 52). He toiled in a carpenter shop, content with making wooden plows and mending the rickety furniture of the hamlet until He was thirty years of age. Then, the fulness of time having come, He answered the summons of a travailing world that had been ever ringing in His ears.

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

In the case of this Younger son in the parable, leaving home was entering into freedom from restraint. He had been "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined." The uneventful program of the home-life wearied him. Impatience had grown into a habit until, like the starling in the *Sentimental Journey*, his soul kept crying "I can't get out!" But he must get out! So having a will of his own, he "gathers all together," shoulders his pack and yonder he goes. Farewell to the carking cares of the dreary old farm and welcome—what?

But why did not his father, knowing the perils of the world beyond those hills, prevent him? Possibly he could not. It may be that, having recently come of age, the lad was entitled to his "portion of goods": in which case, under the Jewish law, parental authority could no longer constrain him.

At any rate, so far as Divine authority goes, every man is practically of age; so that when the Father says, "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not" he can obey or disobey. Man is really the only free agent in the universe. All the lower orders of life—beasts of the forest, fowls of the air, fishes of the sea—are obliged by instinct to obey the law of their being; but unfortunately man can do as he pleases about it.

Not many years ago a prominent infidel, in a

THE YOUNGER SON

lecture on God's mistakes, was fond of saying, "If I had been making a world I would have made a better one and a better man to live in it. I would have made a man who couldn't go wrong, and a world that wouldn't tempt him." Not to dwell upon the sacrilegious phase of that observation, let us look a little into the plain common sense of it.

HOW ABOUT THE "BETTER MAN" ?

What sort of a man would he be who had no freedom of choice? A mere homunculus—an automaton, wound up to go one way and no other. Innocent? Certainly, as innocent as a graven image or a newel-post, but absolutely without character. For character is the result of trial based on choices for good or ill. There is a very real sense, therefore, in which every human not only can but must be a "self-made man."

When God made Adam He left room for choices. It is written that He created him "in his own likeness." This means more than that man was made merely innocent, that is, negatively free from sin. The point at which humanity touches Divinity most distinctively is in the possession of a sovereign will. The Garden of Eden was a scene of perfect peace and beauty; but the gardener was obliged to "till and keep" it; otherwise he would lose it.

One small item in the tillage of the Garden was

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

the safeguarding of a particular tree, called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Any other tree would have answered for the testing just as well. The point was that a ban was put upon that particular tree. In the exercise of his sovereign will, Adam chose to disobey. By that act of disobedience he "fell" from his high estate of innocency and harmony with God.

More than that: he lost his opportunity of full moral development. For disobedience is sin: and one voluntary act is the beginning of a tendency and the foundation of a habit which precludes all possibility of growing into the complete measure of character. Thus, by a single wrong choice, our primal progenitor made life an uphill road not only for himself but for his children after him.

One need not insist on the so-called doctrine of "original sin" as laid down in *The New England Primer*:

*"In Adam's fall
We sinnéd all."*

The scientific fact of heredity, as established and universally conceded in these last days, will answer just as well. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes;" so far there is no difference of opinion; and, somehow or other, "the children's teeth are set on edge." So long as the universal tendency is undisputed it matters little how we call the logical

THE YOUNGER SON

nexus by which it connects up with those who have gone before us.

The important fact to be emphasized is our freedom of choice "betwixt the worse and better reason." It was for the Younger son to say whether he would remain at home, under salutary restraint, or gang his ain gait; and he decided to go. Notwithstanding heredity and environment, fatalistic science and the irresistible logic of Jonathan Edwards to the contrary, every man knows to the uttermost heights of his reason and the lowermost depths of his experience that he is a free agent in his moral relations with God, himself and his fellow men.

AND HOW ABOUT THE "BETTER WORLD" ?

Let us suppose that the making of the world had been committed to the distinguished infidel referred to, would his world really have been a better world to live in? Not better than Paradise, of course; but even better than the world as it is?

Here "thorns infest the ground." There are wars and rumors of war among the nations; family feuds; individual pains and sorrows; toilsome days and sleepless nights. No doubt if sin had never entered the world, it would have been a better world to live in; but unfortunately sin is an accomplished fact and the world must be taken not for what it might have been but for what it is.

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

And thorns have their uses: witness Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12: 7-9). The graces of character are acquired, as a rule, in the school of adversity. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby," that is, to such as are wise enough to profit by it. Wherefore, "my brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; . . . knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." In the words of Milton:

*"Prosperity conceals our brightest ray;
As night to stars, woe lustre gives to man."*

Here emerges the old question, "Why does not God kill the devil?" The answer is: "Because, as conditions are, the evil one has his place in the far-reaching economy of divine grace." Not that there is any smallest fraction of goodness in him; but his malevolent plans for the undoing of man are so overruled by superior wisdom and power as to contribute to the betterment of right-minded men; just as the tactics of a cunning foe are often utilized for the relief of a beleaguered city.

It thus appears that the world is not such a bad world after all: certainly not if its worst conditions are so subsidized by a gracious God as to make for the betterment of willing men. In other words,

THE YOUNGER SON

“All things work together for good to them that love God.”

WHO IS TO BLAME, THEN?

Another of the questions propounded by the infidel referred to is this: “If God made me as I am, and put me into the world such as it is, why is He not responsible for the outcome?”

The answer is at hand: God did not make me “as I am” nor the world “as it is.” He made man innocent and free to develop character by trial; and He made a pleasant world for him to dwell in: so that, if man and his world go wrong he has nobody but himself to blame. As things are, we are no doubt handicapped by both heredity and environment; but, on the other hand, we have infinite resources of helpfulness at our command, if we choose to take advantage of them. For “if God be for us, who can be against us?” And that God is for us is evidenced by the supreme fact that He has sent His only begotten Son into the world to champion our cause. Here is Christ’s promise: “Lo, I am with you alway: I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

And still, we are free to accept Christ or reject Him. If one prefers to stand alone and, in voluntary self-dependence, fails to make good, whom but himself shall he blame for it?

Here we leave the Younger son on his way to the

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

far country. He has chosen to have his fling, heedless of consequences. But even in that far country the memory of the old home will follow him. In the lone watches of many a night, restless after his revels, he will have visions of his father standing in the doorway and looking off beyond the distant hills, moving his lips in prayer for the return of his wayward boy.

God never leaves Himself "without a witness," however far His children may wander from the right way. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit?" asks David in one of his despondent hours, "or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea: even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me" (Psalm 139: 7-11).

Such is the Father's love—the love that will not let us go!

IV
IN THE FAR COUNTRY

*“He took his journey into a far country and
there wasted his substance with riotous living.”*

—LUKE 15: 13.

IV

IN THE FAR COUNTRY

THE Younger son has now turned his back on his father's house and, with his pack over his shoulder, is pursuing his way at a swinging gate toward the Land of Self-will. Does he look back? Possibly; to wave his hand in farewell to an old man standing at the farm gate with lips quivering in prayer for his wayward boy. But the heart of the vagabond is too full of hope for vain regret. The die is cast. The call of L'allegro is ringing in his ears. He is free! Free from the wearying tasks of home; free from the vexing restraints of parental authority; free to go his ain gait and work his own sweet will! Away with melancholy! With fond anticipation he hears the alluring voices of those who make merry beyond the hills.

THE WASTREL

Now he has arrived: and life begins. With plenty of money at his command he finds no difficulty in making friends. Hail fellow, well met! He scatters with an open hand, and sycophants wait upon him.

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

The hardest word in our vocabulary to spell and pronounce with a cheerful grace is *thrift*; and lo! the secret of worldly prosperity is in it. Millionaires know this but their sons are slow to perceive it. "Easy come, easy go." A living that comes without earning is soon disposed of.

The easiest word in our vocabulary is *extravagance*: which literally means "wandering out of bounds." Its common definition is reckless spending. This is the world's malady to-day. We Americans are a race of spendthrifts. The habit was contracted in war-time and we are finding it almost impossible to break off. Every half-grown son of wealth must have his "establishment," every workman his flivver. So the waste goes on.

But there is another sort of waste that is immeasurably worse, to wit, the waste of moral resource among those who profess to be followers of Christ. We are splendidly equipped for service. God has given to every Christian "the portion of the inheritance that falleth to him." What are we doing with it? If every Christian were true to his stewardship the world would soon be falling on its knees. But oh, the squandered "livings," the reckless extravagance, the talents wrapped up and buried in the ground! And all the while the Lord, the real owner, is kept waiting to come into His own!

"Boys, I've given up being a good fellow," said

IN THE FAR COUNTRY

one of my classmates at a college reunion. "Ten years of it was enough. Patrimony wasted, outlook sacrificed, everything gone, I made up my mind to turn over a new leaf. And now, after the waste of ten golden years, and five more of decent living, my conclusion is that it's better to be a square man than a good fellow."

The Prodigal has arrived at the same conclusion. His purse is empty. He sits in the swine-field, ragged and hungry, making out an inventory; by which it appears that he is bankrupt. Everything is gone.

MONEY GONE

The loss of his money is least of all: for sooner or later that must slip through our cold fingers anyway. Though a man may be worth a million he cannot carry so much as a farthing with him through the little wicket-gate. We brought nothing into the world and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

*"If thou art rich, thou art poor;
For, like an ass whose back with ingots bows,
Thou bear'st thy heavy burden but a season
And death unloads thee."*

FRIENDS GONE

But the Prodigal has lost his friends also. They were only fair-weather friends at best; and he might have known that in adversity they would

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

forsake him. In one of his pictures Landseer represents a wounded stag, athirst, tired out, and brought to bay. Where are its companions? Yonder they go, over the hills. This is the way of the world.

“*Friends are like melons; shall I tell you why?
To find one good, you must a hundred try.*”

No great loss to the Prodigal, if only he had made a few substantial friends who would stand the test of adversity. Alas, “no man gave unto him.” Alone! Forsaken by those who had dipped with him in the dish! This is the sting of the serpent’s tooth.

REPUTATION GONE

Moreover he has lost his reputation. Nor would that have been an irreparable loss if only he had kept character behind it.

“*Good name in man or woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.*”

But character is the casket of reputation; so that, when both are lost, the man, as Shakespeare says, is “poor indeed.”

SELF-RESPECT GONE

And what has become of the young man’s self-respect? Gone, hand-in-hand with reputation!

IN THE FAR COUNTRY

We are told of a pious New England cobbler whose daily prayer was, "Lord, give me a good opinion of myself"; but how can a man respect himself unless he really has some adequate reason for thinking himself better than a sheep? When James Harper was leaving his country home to make a fortune his mother in bidding him farewell said, "My son, you have good blood in you: remember that." But in the hurly-burly of Vanity Fair one is ever prone to forget his honorable lineage but, worse than that, his Divine birthright as made in the likeness of God.

HIS LIVING GONE

But the most lamentable item in the sad inventory of the Prodigal is the loss of his "living." He has squandered his patrimony, and with it the last remnant of a reasonable claim on his father. He is indeed "no more worthy to be called his son."

An invaluable part of our Christian patrimony is ancestral faith; but only so far forth as we make it our very own and jealously safeguard it. As a mere heirloom it is not worth while. One may die spiritually as well as otherwise by leaning too persistently on his family tree. The fact that my forebears were Christians should, other things being equal, assure my following in their steps: but piety cannot be transmitted like an entailed

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

estate; and notwithstanding free grace and justification by faith there is no "unearned increment" in the kingdom of truth and righteousness. Happy is the man whose fathers loved the Lord, providing he can say:

*" My Lord, MY life, MY sacrifice,
MY Saviour and MY all! "*

The tendency of our time is to belittle everything that savors of the past. We forget that the presumption is always in favor of the *status quo*. The part of wisdom is to hold fast to what the fathers have left us until we are sure that we have something better of our own:

*" O how our hearts beat high with joy
Whene'er we hear that glorious word,
Faith of our fathers! Holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death! "*

To lose the religion of one's ancestors, with no fee simple right in a religion of one's own, is to be left insolvent indeed, without God and without hope in the world. And this is hell; for hell is anywhere without God. Sin in its very essence is alienation from a holy God; wherefore continuance in sin makes the sinful soul its own dungeon and every man his own perpetual jailer.

What is to be done? Is the case a hopeless one? Certainly, from every human point of view. It was an old time pagan who wrote, "Easy is the

IN THE FAR COUNTRY

descent to Avernus; but to retrace one's steps and reach again the upper air, *hoc opus, hic labor est!*" There is no conceivable hope of escape save in divine interposition. God must "make bare his arm" in our behalf, or we are lost. The downward tendency increases with indulgence in the downward way. But with God all things are possible (John 3: 16).

THE PENITENT

A few years ago the paying teller of one of our banks stole a hundred thousand dollars and disappeared. One morning the papers announced that he had been found dead by his own hand in a foreign city, with a letter near by saying that everything was gone that made life worth living and he "might as well make an end of it." That spells *remorse*; the haunting spectre of a wasted life.

It was remorse that embittered the heart of Lord Byron and moved him in mid-manhood to write:

*"My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of life are gone;
The worm, the canker and the grief
Are mine alone!"*

The gifted pen of Edgar Allan Poe was dipped in remorse when, at an early age, he wrote of the raven sitting and croaking over his chamber door:

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

*"And my soul from out that shadow . . .
Shall be lifted—nevermore!"*

But there is something better than remorse, namely, repentance. This is the "sorrow that needeth not to be repented of." It means "right about face." The Prodigal will not be helped by merely grieving over his losses; for, as the Arabs say, "The remembrances of past happiness are the wrinkles of the soul." But suppose he cuts loose from his associations and bestirs himself to get out of the Far Country, what then? Nostalgia is a disease for which there is no other cure but retracing one's steps.

We think of Judas with abhorrence because he betrayed Christ; but wherein did his offense differ from that of Peter who thrice denied his Lord, saying with an oath, "I never knew him"? The former was moved by avarice; but the latter added a most contemptible cowardice to his treachery. No sooner did Judas realize the enormity of his crime in its tragical *dénouement* than he hastened to the Judgment Hall with his thirty tainted pieces of silver and casting them down with the cry "I have betrayed innocent blood!" went out and hanged himself. That was *remorse*. Peter, the headstrong coward, under the reproving glance of Jesus, "went out and wept bitterly." Had his sorrow ended in bitter tears, that too would have

IN THE FAR COUNTRY

been remorse; but his was the sorrow that needeth not to be repented of because it led to an immediate mending of his ways. He no longer followed Jesus "afar off"; no longer warmed his hands at the enemy's fire; but fell into line and ever after continued faithful unto death. That was repentance. True repentance always leads to abandonment of sin. It is thus

*"That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."*

OUR ASSETS

We who profess to be Christians are endowed with a great "living." Vast is the portion of goods that falleth to us: for the proper use of which, as God's stewards, we are accountable to Him. Our responsibility measures up to our privilege. Our money is the Lord's, of course; but that least of all. How about our time and energy? "Waste not, want not." Every hour of every day is laden with opportunity; and every opportunity is marked "waste" or "investment." Throw away an hour and you squander its possibilities. "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price. . . . Not with silver and gold . . . but the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. . . . Therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit which are his." Inasmuch as, in this world, we are serving an ap-

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

prenticeship to fit us for service in the world further on, it behooves us to be constantly mindful of the importance of preparedness. For as this life leaves us, so shall eternity find us. For so it is written, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." The one consideration that makes the crossing supremely solemn is that it marks the crystallization of character. Beyond the border there is no return. "As the tree falleth so also shall it lie." So, if we have anything to learn, any skill to acquire, any duty to perform by way of fitting ourselves for usefulness in the Great Beyond, it behooves us to be up and doing. This is to lay up one's treasure in bags that wax not old; this is thrift that leads on to eternal thriving; this is to be forever and ever "rich toward God."

V
AT HIS WITS' END

"And when he had spent all there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country: and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him."

—LUKE 15: 14-16.

V

AT HIS WITS' END

BEHOLD the Prodigal now, sitting on a trough in the swine-field, casting up his accounts. He has had his fling and this is the miserable end of it. Everything is gone—money gone, friends gone, reputation gone, self-respect gone,—all gone!

I met him on the street the other morning. He buttonholed me with a plea for help. “Who are you?” I asked. “Nobody,” was the answer. “Once I was somebody—but no more.” There was something about him that led me to ask, “What was your college?” He named one of our foremost institutions of learning. “How did this come about?” “Booze.” “Everything gone?” “Except what you see.” And what I saw was a young man in the twenties, in a threadbare suit, red-eyed, hollow-cheeked, “down and out.”

Is there no hope in such a case? Surely. Hope springs exultant in the human breast.

*“Hope like the gleaming taper’s light,
Adorns and cheers our way;
And still, as darker grows the night,
Emits a brighter ray.”*

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

While there's life, there's hope. Why? Because God never leaves Himself "without a witness" (Acts 14: 17).

CONSCIENCE AWAKES

The Younger son in the Far Country still has within him a more or less faithful monitor that, in the silent watches of the night, when the revels are over, reproves him for misbehavior and reminds him of the possibility of better things.

But conscience, like the needle in the mariner's compass, is likely to be so deflected by habit as to become a fallible guide: and, as the magnetic needle must be regulated by adjustment to the Polar Star, so must one's conscience be kept "void of offense" by continual adjustment and readjustment to the authority of the Word of God.

This is why I have called conscience a "more or less" faithful monitor. The worst violations of justice in the history of the world have been under the direction of conscientious men, as witness the Spanish Inquisition and the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. The World War was provoked and engineered by a man who supposed himself to be an immediate "instrument of God." Hence the need of some higher and more infallible authority than conscience, or "the inner consciousness," in matters pertaining to ultimate truth and right conduct. And where can such authority be

AT HIS WITS' END

found elsewhere than in a revelation direct from God?

It is the prime function of conscience to convict of sin; as Shakespeare says:

*"My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain."*

But mere conviction "makes cowards of us all." It leads only to remorse and thence to despair and the Bridge of Sighs:

*"Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery,
Swift to be hurled—
Anywhere, anywhere
Out of the world!"*

There are two kinds of conviction, as there are two twilights in every twenty-four hours, one leading to ever deepening darkness, the other shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. When conscience leads the sinner to look unto the hills from whence cometh his help, and his only help, remorse takes on hope and becomes repentance unto life; and despair, under the luminous shadow of the Cross, is transformed into the joy of salvation.

MEMORY REVIVES

The Younger son, even in his lowest estate, has still another incentive to retrace his steps:

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

*"Oft in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond memory brings the light
Of other days around me."*

Here in the swine-field the Younger son recalls the privileges and pleasures of his early life and sadly contrasts them with his present condition: "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" Thus he is slowly but surely "coming to himself" and to repentance, which is the "sorrow that needeth not to be repented of."

One of the stories that I heard in my boyhood was of a little girl who was carried away by the Indians and grew up to womanhood in a wigwam. All search was futile for a score of years, when news came that she was living in a distant camp. Her mother found her there, garbed like an Indian maid and indifferent to all persuasive approach. At length the mother began to sing the old lullaby, "Hush, my babe, lie still and slumber:" and in response to that reminder of her childhood the heart of the captive was turned homeward.

But memory alone serves only to further aggravate the pains of remorse.

*"For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these:
'It might have been.'"*

AT HIS WITS' END

The mere recalling of lost privileges and wasted opportunities leads but to brooding melancholy. There must be a looking away from self, an upward look, a vision like that of Jacob the forlorn fugitive who saw a ladder leading up to a father's love. Then homesickness blends with happy hope, as in the song of the Scotch exile:

*"I am far frae my hame, an' I'm weary aften whiles,
For the langed-for hame-bringin' an' my Father's
welcome smiles;
An' I'll ne'er be fu' content, until mine een do see
The gowden gates o' heav'n an' my ain countrie.
The earth is fleck'd wi' flowers, mony-tinted, fresh
an' gay,
The birdies warble blithely, for my Father made
them sae;
But these sights an' these soun's will as naething
be to me,
When I hear the angels singin' in my ain countrie.*

* * * * *

*Sae little noo I ken, o' yon blesséd bonnie place,
I only ken it's hame, whaur we shall see His face;
It wad surely be eneuch for ever mair to be
In the glory o' His presence in oor ain countrie.
Like a bairn to its mither, a wee birdie to its nest,
I wad fain be gangin' noo, unto my Saviour's
breast,
For He gathers in His bosom witless, worthless
lambs like me,
An' carries them Himsel', to His ain countrie.*

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

*He's faithfu' that hath promised, He'll surely come
again,
He'll keep His tryst wi' me, at what oor I dinna
ken;
But He bids me still to wait, an' ready aye to be,
To gang at ony moment to my ain countrie.
Sae I'm watching aye, an' singing o' my hame as I
wait,
For the soun'ing o' His fitfa' this side the gowden
gate;
God gie His grace to ilka ane wha' listens noo to
me,
That we a' may gang in gladness to oor ain coun-
trie."*

THE WIRELESS MESSAGE

Another influence in the Prodigal's favor was prayer: not his own, however. It goes without saying that his father was a praying man. As the old man stood in his doorway, looking off beyond the hills toward the far country, he no doubt often lifted his heart and moved his lips in fervent supplication to the God of all grace in behalf of his wayward boy. It is inconceivable that the Prodigal did not know this and at times feel it.

What is prayer but a wireless message that not only speeds to heaven but fills the ether in between? It is as mysterious as radio. The intercessory plea of parental suppliants is not infrequently keyed to the palpitation of hearts beyond the seas. The story of the bearded sailor who

knocked at a cottage door and said to the gray-haired woman who opened it, "Mother, you have prayed me home," is no fable. It happens every day.

Great is the power of intercession! A man once in Capernaum was so paralyzed that when he heard that Jesus was working miracles in the town he could do nothing to reach Him, even had he been so disposed. But he had four good friends who carried him on a litter and let him down through the roof at the feet of the Great Physician. Whereupon, it is written, He "seeing their faith" healed him. Observe, it was not his faith but *theirs* that Jesus saw. By this token let interceding parents find hope in importunity.

*"Don't stop praying, the Lord is nigh;
Don't stop praying, He'll hear your cry!"*

His covenant is Yea and Amen: "I will be a God to you and to your children after you." The trial of faith is involved in this tarrying of His. When Mary and Martha sent word to Him that their brother was desperately ill, "he abode two days still in the same place where he was," but not because He was indifferent to their plea. "The vision is yet for an appointed time . . . though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come" (Hab. 2: 3).

On the fly-leaf between the Old and New Testa-

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

ments of my Bible are these words: "A seeking sinner finds a seeking Saviour," written fifty years ago by one who knew, one who lingered long in the Far Country to find all his doubts and misgivings put to shame at last by the waiting love of God.

But still it remains for the Prodigal to act for himself.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Back of all the gracious, "hame-bringing" influences in this world of ours is the Spirit of the loving God. Conscience, memory and intercessory prayer are merely channels and agencies through which He works upon the hearts of men. Nearer still is His personal approach. He speaks, He persuades, He urges: "Come now, saith the Lord, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." There are times when every wanderer hears the voice, whether he traces it to its Divine source or not.

*"These fond desires which in thee burn,
Were kindled by His grace."*

It is the official function of the Holy Ghost, as the Executive of the Kingdom of Christ, to take of the things of Jesus and show them unto us (Read John 16:1-15). We have much to say of the Father's love and of the Saviour's love, but how

AT HIS WITS' END

seldom we speak of "the love of the Spirit" (Rom. 15: 30). Yet He is forever drawing us with cords of love and inclining the hearts of the expatriated to take the homeward way.

One may "resist the Spirit"; as, indeed we all do when, despite His drawings toward truth and righteousness, we prefer to continue in sin (Acts 7: 51).

Or we may "grieve the Spirit," as a child grieves its mother by persistent disobedience: and what a sidelight we have, in that figure of speech, into the loving heart of God! (Eph. 4: 30).

And, alas, one may ultimately "quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5: 19). The resisting and grieving may go on until this heavenly Friend departs from us. This is "the unpardonable sin"; unpardonable in the very nature and necessity of the case, since to be "without God" is also to be "without hope." But inasmuch as the unpardonable sin leaves one in utter indifference to spiritual things, the least remnant of regret or the smallest fraction of desire is still evidence of hope. *Forsitan scintilla!* The lingering spark may yet enkindle, in the embers of a sluggish soul, the resolution to "arise and go."

One of the first of the recorded words of God is this: "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen. 6: 3). And one of the last is this: "The Lord . . . is longsuffering to us-ward,

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). It thus appears that the Lord of divine patience may be worn out by oft repeated refusal or long continued indifference. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," He says. "If any man hear my voice and open the door I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me." So then, the door must be opened from within; and none but the man within can open it.

A child who had been gazing intently at Tissot's picture of the hungry Prodigal sitting hopelessly in the swine-field cried out, "Oh, why doesn't he go straight home?" Why, indeed? I wonder if some one, weary of the far country, is now reading these lines of mine? If so, why doesn't he go straight home? The Father's house and heart are open to him.

Meanwhile, it behooves the Prodigal's friends to keep on praying for him.

*"Prayer moves the Hand that moves the world
To bring salvation down."*

The "lapsed masses" are not beyond the grace of God. The "submerged tenth," aye, even the sinking swimmer, may be rescued if the coast guards are faithful with the life-line.

Wherefore to your knees, O Israel! Pray without ceasing, husbands for wives, parents for chil-

AT HIS WITS' END

dren, friends for friends. God loves our impotency, our persistency, our faith. In due time He will hear and answer. His Covenant with His people is yea and Amen.

*"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy
voice*

Rise like a fountain for me night and day.

* * * * *

*For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."*

Wherefore let us be faithful in our watch-towers, knowing that a great happiness awaits the life-savers; as it is written, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars, forever and ever." And let us keep on praying for those who have not yet accepted Christ.

VI
RIGHT ABOUT FACE

"And when he came to himself,—"—LUKE 15 : 17.

VI

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

THERE is no such thing, they say, as an indivisible unit. The uttermost atom that has been discovered is composed of subatoms. God Himself is a Tri-unity. It would be strange if man, His masterpiece, created in His likeness and after His image, were indivisibly one. In fact, a man is always two men, a better and a meaner self. The original man in the Garden of Eden was "divided betwixt two," one of him looking toward the tree of life and the other toward the tree of knowledge. Out of that divergent look, as Milton says, "came death into the world and all our woes."

THE GRAPPLE

In the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the city of New York there is a colossal group of statuary entitled *The Two Natures*, in which a man's nobler self is represented wrestling with his other and meaner self. This suggests a great psychological fact.

It is safe to say that a conflict of emotions was going on in the breast of the Prodigal when he set

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

out for the far country with his pack over his shoulder: One of his selves pleading to continue on the old farm, the other intent upon "seeing the world." And afterward, when the famine overtook him, these two had more than once to face each other and fight out the problem whether to remain in the swine-field or go back to the father's house.

The same sort of struggle goes on in every man. "Hard pounding, gentlemen," said Wellington at Waterloo; but here is harder pounding for you and me; and all heaven depends on the way we "carry on" and finish it.

At this point let us listen to Paul: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7: 18-24).

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

THE DOUBLE HANDICAP

We, of ourselves, are at a great disadvantage in this campaign. I say nothing of "original sin"; the scientific doctrine of heredity, as has already been said, will answer just as well. Our bitterest foes are our forebears. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." Account for it as you please, it is an indisputable fact that our natural tendency, when at the crossroads, is to choose the wrong way.

Our environment also is against us. To follow the fashion is our natural bent; and the fashion is a bad one. "Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help us on to God?" Everybody knows otherwise. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4: 4). One of our oldest hymns (written by Andrew of Crete, about 700 A. D.) runs on this wise:

*"Christian dost thou see them
On the holy ground,
How the powers of darkness
Compass thee around?
Christian dost thou feel them,
How they work within,
Striving, tempting, luring,
Goading into sin?"*

The mark of true greatness, as Macaulay says, "is to rise above one's environment and prove one's self superior to circumstances." But how is this

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

possible? What hope is there for even the bravest struggler, when the odds are so distinctly against him?

GOD TO THE RESCUE

But suppose God lends an everlasting arm? "If God be for us, who shall be against us?" And the Gospel assures us that, in the irresistible might of the ever present Christ, He stands ready to help. He forces this interposition upon none, but invariably answers all who call upon Him. It is for our sovereign wills to determine whether we will depend upon ourselves or upon Him.

*"He giveth day; thou hast thy choice
To walk in darkness still."*

VICTORY IN DEFEAT

It is thus, if ever, that the sweet flower of victory is plucked from the prickly thistle of defeat. One of the rude poetasters says:

*"In battle or business, whatever the game,
In love or in logic, 'tis ever the same,
In the struggle for fame or the grapple for pelf,
Let this be your motto—Rely on yourself."*

But that way lies failure. In the pursuit of the noblest and best, experience proves that self-reliance is a broken reed on which, if a man lean, it will pierce through his hand.

The crisis of life is picturesquely set forth in the story of Jacob wrestling with the Angel at the brook Jabbok. Up to that eventful hour he had been a self-reliant man and far and away the meanest of the patriarchs; but then and there the matter came to a final issue. "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day . . . and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him." Thrown at last, he arose a cripple and a new man! He was knighted in his surrender: "Thy name shall be . . . Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God . . . and hast prevailed."

In quoting from Paul a moment ago we did him an injustice, in not hearing him to the end. After that desperate cry of his, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—in which we see him sinking like a strangling swimmer with a corpse fastened about his neck—he "comes to himself" with another cry, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" He has found his helper; and thenceforth not life, nor death, nor principalities nor powers can prevail against him. Old Saul of Tarsus, his meaner self, is dead; and Paul the Apostle is born, a living man!

In the light of that experience we can understand what Paul means when he says: "For I, through the law am dead unto the law, that I might

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2: 20). And again, "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him" (2 Tim. 2: 11). And again, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him which died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. 5: 14-15).

No man ever reaches his best estate until he graduates out of self-reliance into faith. In the parable this is designated by the phrase, "Coming to himself." The turning point in the Prodigal's life was when he saw the folly of his profligacy and resolved that his higher nature should have the upper hand of his meaner self.

But he knew that, when that resolve was made, everything still depended on the attitude of his father toward him. His faith in his father's love was but a tremulous thing, like a reed shaken in the wind; venturing on no larger hope than to be received "as an hired servant"; but his father's love was larger than he dreamed, a love that would not quench the smoking flax nor break the bruised reed. His little faith, under his father's care, was

RIGHT ABOUT FACE

destined to grow, like a grain of mustard seed, until all the singing birds of a happier, better life would be lodging in the branches of it.

Blessed is the man who knows when and how to take advantage of a little faith! From small beginnings all great issues flow. Good impulses used at the right moment lead on to character and usefulness; wasted opportunities make up the sum and substance of wasted lives.

On the shield of an old Saxon knight was the picture of a hand reached up and a hand reached down to clasp it and over them the legend, "Will, God, and I can!" Here is an irresistible union; the will of a man, impotent in itself, reaching up to the power of a loving God and becoming omnipotent! So it is written, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

This is the great discovery that one makes when he "comes to himself": that is, when realizing his sin and helplessness he resolves to accept Christ as "the arm of the Lord made bare" to help him.

So long as Luther relied upon the saving merit of monastic rites and ceremonies he was without assurance of salvation: he found unalloyed peace when he cast himself wholly and unreservedly on the saving power of Christ. In one of his sermons he says, "If you knock on my breast and ask, 'Who lives here?' I answer, 'Once on a time a man named Martin Luther lived here; but he has

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

moved out and now Christ liveth in me.' ” To be able to speak in that manner is to stand upon the highest summit of the Christian life: the old self being crucified with Christ and the new and better self alive,—triumphantly and forevermore alive unto God!

The appeal is to our better nature, to everything hopeful and high-minded within us. Whining ceases. God does His best; our part is to co-operate with Him.

It is thus that we rise to higher things: never “attaining” or quite “apprehending” but always “reaching forth and pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

His stimulating call is always, “Come up higher!” Higher, ever higher! The golden milestone will be reached when we finally attain unto His likeness; and that will never be until we awake and see Him as He is.

VII
A GOOD RESOLUTION

“He said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father.”—LUKE 15: 17-18.

VII

A GOOD RESOLUTION

WE left the Prodigal in a tight place. He who quit his home so jauntily a while ago, dreaming dreams of a merry life, is reduced to the last extremity of shameful poverty and helplessness, feeding swine and looking with covetous eyes on the very husks given them to eat! What shall he do? Go on at this rate or retrace his steps? It is no easy matter to decide either way: but necessity is upon him.

*“ There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune:
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.”*

How often we stand thus, at the crossing of the ways where, as it is written, we can hear a Voice behind us saying “ This is the way; walk ye in it ” (Isa. 30: 4).

It is precisely such moments that determine destiny. What is required now? Resolution—to “screw one’s courage to the sticking point.”

They say “hell is paved with good resolutions.”

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

That depends. With resolutions? Yes; promises made and never kept; but not with good resolutions: A good resolution involves three essential factors. Our whole being conspires to frame it.

MIND

To begin with, our intellectual powers are involved. The Gospel must seem reasonable before one can reasonably accept it. "He that cometh to God," for example, "must believe that he is:" but how can one believe in anything at which reason revolts? Hence the necessity of thinking out the great problems of the spiritual life.

Our doubts are due to ineffectual thinking. The man who boards a train for anywhere in particular would not expect to reach his destination if he impatiently debarked at the first water-tank along the way. It is this sort of mental travelling that makes agnostics. We arrive nowhere because we think out nothing to the end. We lack convictions because we are content with mere impressions. An opinion is the blighted seed of a principle. One who looks long enough into the face of any truth is sure to assent to it. Certainly, one who bravely and persistently faces the problem of all problems, "What think ye of Jesus which is called the Christ?" is certain to arrive at the conclusion that He was precisely what He claimed to be, namely, the only begotten and co-equal Son of God.

A GOOD RESOLUTION

CONSCIENCE

But intellectual conviction is not enough. The poet who wrote "The mind's the standard of the man" was a near-sighted psychologist. The Golden Age of philosophy in Athens was the iron age of moral character. The two young men who were convicted some short while ago of a nameless crime in Chicago were college men, top-heavy with the learning of the schools. Thus it appears that before one can rightly decide any problem whatever he must be satisfied that what is proposed is right. Here is where conscience comes in.

And every man has a conscience; an inward monitor which, as Plato says, "enables him to discern between the worse and better reason"; or, as Paul says, "accuses or else excuses him."

It cannot be doubted that the Prodigal had recently been looking in upon himself. He was aware of his misbehavior: but that did not help him to budge an inch. There he sat, uncomfortable but inactive. Conscience is a fine irritant but, of itself, gets us nowhere. It leaves us hesitant and trembling at the crossways, "letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would'." Thus, as Hamlet says, "Conscience doth make cowards of us all." I do not believe that anywhere there lives a man familiar with the Gospel who does not know and inwardly confess that to follow Christ is the right thing to

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

do; but it is quite another thing to boldly rise up and follow Him, whithersoever He may choose to lead.

RESOLUTION

As we have seen, a man must not only be convicted of sin but convinced of the reasonableness of the opposite course before he can be fully disposed to take it. Our religion calls for nothing that is not conformable to common sense. "Come now, saith the Lord, and let us reason together." Conviction of truth is the basis of character. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

We are bound to think, and to do our own thinking. Here is where the parable of the wayward son parts company with that of the piece of silver, an insensate thing for which the only thinking must be done by the woman who lost it. No man is at liberty to farm out his thinking to other men. As rational beings, capable of "thinking God's thoughts after Him," we are responsible for our mental and moral processes and for their consequent decisions and results.

The parable of the lost sheep makes a nearer approach to that of the Prodigal, in the fact that the lost creature is sensible of its condition though incapable of willing to return or finding the homeward way. The good shepherd, in his endeavor to seek and find, has no assistance save the hope-

A GOOD RESOLUTION

less bleating of the lost one. Nevertheless he seeks until he finds it:

*"But all thro' the mountains thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
There arose a glad cry to the gates of heaven
'Rejoice, I have found my sheep!'
And the angels echoed around the throne
'Rejoice! for the Lord brings back his own!'"*

But being convinced is not being moved. Our intellectuals are not dynamic. The three fundamental facts of Christianity are so reasonable that it is difficult to see how any reasonable man can reject them. First: the Incarnation, which is simply God's going out to seek the lost. Second: the Atonement, which is the crowning of His quest with the proffer of a free salvation. Third: the Resurrection, which is the return of the divine Seeker with the lost under the lapel of His cloak. All three are mysteries; yet all are reasonable and precisely what should be expected of a loving God. Nevertheless

*"He that complies against his will,
Is of his own opinion still."*

The mind itself has no motor. To have an intellectual apprehension of truth is no guaranty of corresponding action. The Greek poet Theocritus tells of a fisherman who dreamed that he had taken goldfish in his net but, on awaking, complained

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

that they had "swum out through the holes of his eyes." Our opinions, even our intellectual and conscientious beliefs, have a way of escaping in like manner, without being translated into life.

"Faith without works is dead;" that is, it is nothing at all. Thirty-nine articles in a creed plus one hundred and seven right answers in a catechism are valueless unless yoked up with volition and experience. Mere knowledge is static, quiescent, immovable. It must have a fire kindled under it before it can get anywhere, or push or draw anything. And here is where the will comes in.

ACTION

It was possible, no doubt, for God to make something in the semblance of a man without the equipment of a sovereign will: but that something would have been merely a manikin and in nowise "after his own likeness." The lower orders of life can only go as their Creator decrees; but man, when God says "Thou shalt," can answer "I will not!" At the crossways he is at liberty to choose for himself whether he will take the right or the wrong way.

Our destiny for an eternal better or worse is determined by the proper use of this freedom. Whether it shall lead to heaven or hell depends on how we interpret and act upon it.

There are those who regard it as a mere license

A GOOD RESOLUTION

to play fast and loose with truth and morality: Consequently as "free thinkers" they become wild rovers of the sea. There are others who define freedom as "perfect obedience to perfect law"; and accordingly they do their thinking within the limitations of intellectual law and endeavor to live and act within the boundaries of divine authority.

There are some who insist on the exercise of personal liberty without any control beyond that of their "inner consciousness," or any consideration of communal rights. There are others who realize that individual freedom ends where social freedom begins, and that all freedom whatsoever is qualified by the reasonable claims of God.

The Prodigal in the swine-field is mulling over problems like these. His mind and conscience are at work and his sovereign will is struggling to act. He knows what is right and what is reasonable. The question is, What will he do? He is inclined to go home; but inclination is not resolution and resolution is not action. He says at length, "I will arise and go;" but saying so does not make it so. He rises and sets out. It still remains, however, to see whether or no his resolution is a good one. He has miles before him, over hill and down dale. Will he hold out?

He trudges on, day after day, hungry and weary, until at length he comes within sight of his father's house—and there he halts! But his father sees

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

him, knows him, comes out to meet him "while he is yet a great way off," falls on his neck and kisses him, throws an arm around the faint and weary boy and helps him on!

What does that mean? If it means anything, it means that it takes God to round out resolution. It is useless to say "Hold on, hold fast, hold out;" a man must have something to hold on to. In other words, God must be taken into the reckoning. When our will is yoked up with His, there's no such word as "fail." He always comes out to meet the returning wanderer while "yet a great way off." "All's well that ends well." "If God be for us, who shall be against us?"

But where shall we find God? In Christ, who said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." Christ is God coming out to meet the sinner and offering him an omnipotent arm to lean on. Thus buttressed he can confidently say, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

We are all the while choosing "betwixt the worse and better reason." Life is made up of choices. But let us make no mistake; inclinations are not choices; and choices are not resolutions unless carried out; and resolutions are not finally approved as good until they land us across the threshold of the Father's house.

VIII
A POOR PRAYER

"And [I] will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."—LUKE 15: 18, 19.

VIII

A POOR PRAYER

THE Younger son is on his way back to his father's house. No luggage hampers him; no scrip nor girdle is needed to contain the meager remnants of his "living." He is a vagabond, hungry and ragged, with resolution tugging at his heartstrings.

Will he arrive? That remains to be seen. "Let not him that putteth on the harness boast as he that taketh it off."

On his way over weary stretches of hill and dale he composes and rehearses the appeal which he proposes to make on reaching home: "I will say unto my father, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son ——"

So far so good: every word is true to the circumstances of his case. He is unworthy: so unworthy that any welcome that awaits him must be wholly gratuitous. A conviction like this is well on toward repentance. Up to this point his prayer is very like that of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" The only way to Heaven is over the Hill of Repentance and under the shadow of the Cross; or, as Wesley used to put it:

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

*"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."*

One of the faults of our time is the minimizing of sin. We rarely hear nowadays of "the exceeding sinfulness of sin." It is no longer "any want of conformity unto or transgression of the divine law," but a casual mistake, a misfortune, a constitutional infirmity. Theft is not plain stealing any more but "kleptomania"; and old-fashioned drunkenness is "dipsomania." The Prodigal's confession is ruled out: so far from having sinned against heaven and in his father's sight, he is merely a victim of conditions in the Far Country, and must be treated accordingly, with extreme sympathy and indulgent care.

But this Prodigal was right: he had sinned—sinned against heaven and in his father's sight—and was no more worthy to be called his son. Such an honest confession is good for the soul; for as Solomon says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28: 13). And, as John writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1: 9).

If only the young man had stopped there! But he went on, "I pray thee make me as one of thy

A POOR PRAYER

hired servants: " and that addendum made his supplication a poor prayer, because, as thus formulated, it was an unworthy one.

In our approach to God it behooves us to remember that He is the infinitely Holy One who has been justly offended by our sins. Hence the necessity of a reverent posture. But we are never to forget that " we have an Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous," in whose name we may " approach boldly unto the throne of grace," assured that " whatsoever we shall ask of the Father in his name " (John 15: 16) will surely be done unto us (Heb. 4: 16).

NO SELF-RESPECT

For one thing, this plea indicated that the Prodigal had no just conception of his own value in his father's sight. No matter how low a sinner may have fallen through reckless living in the Far Country, there is still in him a lingering spark of the Divine likeness which keeps him " respectable," that is, worthy of respect, his own and everybody else's.

If Isaac Watts, when he wrote:

*" Great God, how infinite Thou art,
What worthless worms are we!"*

meant that a man, even at his worst, is of no more importance than a crawling thing in the Divine

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

sight, he was a long way from reason and the mind of God. Three times in Scripture man is likened to a worm; once when Bildad the Shuhite was reproving Job for hoping to be justified (Job 25: 6), again when David mourned that God had forsaken him (Psalm 22: 6), and still again when the Lord said, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, for I am with thee" (Isa. 41: 14). The two former were instances of mistaken judgment and, in the third case, the word was significant, not of worthlessness but of weakness and of encouragement to lean on God.

Humility is one thing, servility another. The former is best defined by John Milton as "that lofty lowliness of mind which is exalted by its own abasement:" the latter by Dickens in the contemptible character of *Uriah Heep*. It is right that a man should approach his Maker with bowed head and contrite heart, yet let him ever be mindful of the fact that by creation he is only "a little lower than the angels," and that there is hope unto the uttermost, as it is written, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

NO AMBITION

It is better to aim hopefully at the sun than to be so hopeless as to have no feather on one's shaft. As a rule, we get what we strive for. I never see a group of Italians at work under a "boss" with-

A POOR PRAYER

out wondering why they are apparently so content with a shovel when each might so easily be his own "padrone"? For there's always more "room at the top" than anywhere else. It is the lack of ambition on the part of our "common workmen" that keeps their ranks full; and the fact that there are so many minimum Christians in our churches is to be accounted for in the same way.

The Prodigal asked to be treated merely "as an hired servant." In the name of all warrantable pride had he not been surfeited with that sort of thing when he went and hired himself out as a swineherd to a citizen of the Far Country? Man, hold up your head! The apostle Paul was humble, so humble that he called himself "the chief of sinners"; but, by the same token, he was never forgetful of divine origin and his "high calling in Christ Jesus." Wherefore, my friend, whatever may have happened in our case, God help us to quit ourselves like men.

It is easy to be a fair-to-middling sort of Christian. It has been wisely observed that the Good is the worst enemy of the Best. The curse of the Church is satisfaction with mediocrity. To be "saved, so as by fire," like righteous Lot, is obviously better than to perish in Sodom; but to go swinging through the gates with "an abundant entrance" into the Celestial City, is far more worthy of a full-grown man.

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

NO ADEQUATE FAITH

This son had been brought up in a kind father's house and yet was uncertain as to what sort of reception awaited him. It was inevitable that any such misgiving as to his father's love would clip the wings of his prayer. He "knew not what to ask for as he ought," because he questioned his father's willingness to give. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

God is a great giver. He delights to give abundantly to those who trust Him. "Open thy mouth wide," He says, "and I will fill it" (Psalm 81: 10). I wonder if David, when he wrote that, was thinking of something he had seen while watching his flocks among the hills—an eagle's nest and a hungry brood with open bills greeting the mother bird on her return with the day's rations? In any case, such should be our sense of dependence on a kind Providence and faith in His loving care.

It is related that one of the soldiers of Alexander the Great who had distinguished himself in battle, on being asked what reward he should be given replied, "The command of a battalion;" whereupon the Prime Minister who stood by exclaimed, "Sire, this is great presumption!" But the King quietly observed, "Give him what he

A POOR PRAYER

asks; his presumption honors me!" We seek and are contented with too little. Let us, as William Carey said, "undertake great things for God and expect great things from Him":

*"For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind."*

It is a great thing to be enrolled as one of the servants of the King: *Ich dien* is a royal motto; nevertheless the King says to those who link their fortunes with His cause, "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name he may give it you."

NO CONTINUANCE

The prayer of the Prodigal, moreover, was a poor prayer because it did not hold out. When he came within sight of his father's house his courage failed him and he halted in his tracks. But across the meadow yonder an old man had long been hoping against hope and looking off toward the hills. On seeing his wayward boy he knew him—despite

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

his rags he knew him—and staff in hand he hastened to meet him “while he was yet a great way off.”

“And he fell on his neck and kissed him.” The whole content of the Gospel was in that kiss. It sealed the Prodigal’s lips, so that his contemplated plea for a servant’s place in his father’s house was never spoken. Thus are our poor prayers intercepted and amended and adjusted to the loving mind of God by an all-wise Mediator at the throne of heavenly grace. “We know not what to pray for as we ought”; but we have a Friend who “ever liveth to make intercession for us.”

A great surprise awaits us in heaven. The Prodigal would have been content with the place of a menial in his father’s fields; but behold him sitting at table in his father’s house, clothed in a sumptuous robe and wearing a signet ring! Then listen to this: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him!” Or this: “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” Or this, “Beloved, now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

IX

THE LOVE THAT WILL NOT
LET US GO

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."—LUKE 15: 20, 21.

IX

THE LOVE THAT WILL NOT LET US GO

IT is easy to say "God is love,"—just as easy as to say "eternity" or "infinite space,"—and just as difficult to measure what we are saying. We are like children on the beach trying to dip up the ocean in a gourd. O the length, and breadth, and depth and height of it!

In all the sweep of human observation and experience there is no suitable analogy for the love of God; the nearest approach to it is in the attitude of the father in this parable toward his wayward boy. Observe to begin with, his love was

A CARE-TAKING LOVE

It would appear that this Younger son had a wayward will of his own, a will that had involved him in a sea of troubles: but even in the ungrateful years of his expatriation, his father had been loving him. And after his return he was fed at the same table and clothed as comfortably as his Elder brother, though from every worldly point of view he ill deserved it.

In like manner the gifts of Providence are distributed "without respect of persons." The rain

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

falls upon the thirsty fields of "the just and the unjust alike" (Matt. 5: 45) so that even the desolate and waste places are made to rejoice (Job 38: 26).

The conclusion is inevitable: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!" Yet there are multitudes of respectable people who live on God's bounty without the common courtesy of thanks! In the morning they set forth into an Unknown Country of cares and responsibilities without invoking His guidance; and at night they enter another Unknown Country without an apparent thought of His protecting care. Such a prayerless life is a reckless and most unreasonable life.

A PERSEVERING LOVE

But some one may ask, Why did the father of the Prodigal allow him to leave home? Perhaps he knew that, considering all, it was the best thing to do. Over my desk in the old village school was this motto: "*Experience is a bitter school, but fools will learn in no other.*" The Far Country has its lessons. And the issue in this case proved that the father was right. The beggarly youth who returned from that Far Country was a great improvement on the young fellow who, with his "portion of the living" in his girdle, went swinging out toward it.

THE LOVE THAT WILL NOT LET US GO

We pray, "Lead us not into temptation;" and we may be assured that "God tempteth no man" (James 1: 13). Nevertheless if our faces are set toward temptation He may allow it in the hope of our bringing back some salutary lessons from the bitter school. This is a part of our chastening for good; and happy is the man who can profit thereby: as it is written, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12: 11). Furthermore, "we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they verily chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12: 9). And again, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation [trial]; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1: 12).

It is safe to say, however, that after allowing his son to leave home the father did not forget him. He was doubtless disturbed by rumors of his profligate life in the Far Country. There would be heart-soreness, and anxious solicitude and prayers in the wakeful watches of the night. At this very hour there are farmers' sons wasting their sub-

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

stance on "The Great White Way," and girls dancing their young lives away in cabarets, whose parents are staining their pillows with bitter tears and hoping against hope for their return. In this we have a faint similitude of the long-suffering, never-wearying love of God.

It is written of Jesus that when He "knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world, unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world *he loved them unto the end.*" He knew that Judas was about to betray Him, that Peter was about to deny Him, and that all His disciples were about to forsake Him; but that did not cool the ardor of His love. So, sitting on the throne of His majesty, to-day, and witnessing the misdeeds of the children of men, He could end it all and justly with a breath of His nostrils, but His loving heart broods over them. Why are evil-doers spared? "Beloved, the Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3: 9). Witness His forbearance in the case of Ephraim: "I drew him with hands of love and he compassed me about with lies.—How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? . . . How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me!" (Hosea 11: 8).

THE LOVE THAT WILL NOT LET US GO

A FORGIVING LOVE

It is a mistake to say that God meets the returning sinner only "half-way." The Prodigal halts in sight of his home. The hope and courage that have sustained him on his difficult journey thus far have all oozed out. Now what? His father sees him when he is "yet a great way off."

Nor is that all. He might have seen him and not recognized him; but seeing him with the two eyes of his heart he knows this ragged stranger as his own dear boy. And he has "compassion upon him." Pitiful indeed is the bent figure of the Prodigal on yonder hill. All the memories of his sweet, wilful boyhood come thronging to the father's aching heart and eyes. See, he "runs" to meet him! To-morrow he will feel the strain upon his aged limbs but what matters it? His son is coming home! He has reached him; he "falls upon his neck"—(Here imagine a parenthesis with all love's sobbing silences in it)—"and kisses him."

Put into that kiss all the possible content of an infinite heart and you have a faint expression of what Paul intimates where he says: "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

by his Spirit in the inner man: that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God!" (Eph. 3: 14-19).

A FATHER'S LOVE

No reader of the Golden Parable can fail to observe two singular omissions. The first is the absence of all mention of a mother in the Prodigal's home. Is this because we are expected to find both father-love and mother-love in God? (See Isa. 66: 13.) It must be so: otherwise there would be a great something missing in it.

A wife, bearing signs of poverty and ill-usage, once called me to the bedside of her dying husband. "He has lived a bad life," she said, "and I'm not sure he'll see you." When I was announced as the minister he straightway turned his face to the wall and refused to hear or utter a word. I opened the Bible but, instead of reading from the printed page, I began to repeat:

*"The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want:
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by."*

Presently the sick man's shoulders began to trem-

THE LOVE THAT WILL NOT LET US GO

ble, and as I went on, the memories of a home in the Hielands came crowding back to him. Soon a fevered hand was reached out; I held it and went on:

*“Yea, though I walk through Death’s dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill;
For Thou art with me, and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.”*

By that time he was quietly sobbing, “O my mither! Dear mither, I’ve wandered far!” And I have reason to trust that the prodigal came home at that eleventh hour as I knelt in prayer beside him.

Why not? Is it ever too late to mend? “Betwixt the saddle and the ground, mercy sought is mercy found.” It is not safe, however, to presume upon the mercy of God. An old-time writer says: “The Lord saved one penitent thief in His dying hour, so that no one might ever despair; but *only* one, so that none might take undue advantage of His grace.” The part of wisdom is to “seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon him while he is near,” rather than to wait until the currents of the heart run slow and “desire fails.”

The other omission in the Golden Parable is the apparent neglect of the father in not going into the Far Country to seek his son. But “no parable must be made to go on all fours.” The needed thought is supplied in the companion Parable of

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

the Shepherd who "left the ninety and nine and went out after that which was lost until he found it." The whole fabric of divine love is thus completed; as it is written, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." For what is the Incarnation but the going out of the Father into the desert to seek that which was lost?

And here is its corollary: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the [reclaimed] sons of God! Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

X

“GRACE ABOUNDING”

“But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

—LUKE 15: 22-24.

X

“GRACE ABOUNDING”

ONE of the most wonderful chapters in the wonderful Book is the fifth of *Romans*, in which free grace is set forth as the vital factor in Justification by Faith. It concludes thus: “*Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*; that as sin reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” No end of commentaries have been written on those words; but there is none so clear and helpful as that furnished by Christ Himself in this Parable of the Prodigal Son.

See the youth on his arrival at the old home: a sorry figure in rags and tatters: and behold how sin hath abounded! It has wrought its utmost, leaving him without the shadow of a claim upon his father’s favor.

Then look at him a little later, seated at table in his father’s house, as highly favored as if he had never gone wrong: and behold how grace hath much more abounded!¹

¹ Grace and *gratis* are cognate words. Nobody is saved by personal merit; but always by the unmerited favor of God.

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

THE ROBE

Observe, he is clothed in *respectability*. If this bestowal of "the best robe" means anything it means that the father wished it understood that thenceforth his wayward boy was entitled to both self-respect and the respect of those about him. Otherwise any cast-off or partly-worn garments would have been good enough for him.

The sum total of Christian ethics is embraced in righteousness (Zech. 3: 3-5; cf. Eph. 4: 22-24). Only, this righteousness is not self-righteousness but the righteousness of God which is imputed by faith in Christ (Rom. 3: 10-28).

The righteousness thus imputed to the followers of Christ involves, on the one hand, complete freedom from sin and, on the other, complete obedience to divine law. Its other name is holiness, which no man can of himself attain unto, and yet "without which no man shall see God" (Heb. 12: 14). It is only through Christ that our sins are so wholly blotted out and sunk in the unfathomable depths of a soundless sea that they are "remembered no more against us." And it is only as the obedience of Christ is put to our account that we can be reckoned faultless before the law: wherefore, so far as salvation goes, all our boasted righteousness is naught, and we are "complete in him."

"GRACE ABOUNDING"

*"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head."*

This is free grace. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64: 6; cf. Phil. 3: 8-9). The "best robe" is the wedding garment of fine linen clean and white, without which none can appear at the marriage supper of the Lamb! (Matt. 22: 11-12).

THE RING

The Prodigal, having been restored to respectability, is now invested with such *authority* as becomes his father's son.

When Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Forasmuch . . . as there is none so discreet and wise as thou art, thou shalt be over my house and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled," he put a ring on his hand as a token of authority! (Gen. 41: 39-42). In the ring was a seal, which signified that the king himself was thenceforth to be regarded as sponsor for whatever Joseph as his vice-regent might do.

Thus the Prodigal is restored to all the privileges of sonship except that his "portion of the living" has been squandered, leaving his brother sole heir to the farmstead (see verse 31). At this point the Parable would appear to part company with the

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

philosophy of grace, which makes forgiven sinners joint-heirs with Christ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away (1 Pet. 1: 4). But the divergence is only apparent. Sin, however repented of, leaves an ineradicable scar upon the soul; but, in view of the immeasurable riches of pardoning grace, it is a painless scar. How slight the loss of a few paltry acres to the Prodigal now reconciled with his father and restored to the joys of the old home!

In like manner it is written, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3: 21). Mysterious words! Heaven alone can disclose what they mean: as also those other words, "And they shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22: 5).

THE SHOES

In those days shoes were an evident token of *freedom*. The slave was a barefoot man.

The Prodigal came home unshod; nevertheless, once there, he was neither a slave nor an hireling but a member of the family with all attendant privileges, freedom being the chiefest among them.

It is said that Madame Roland, on being condemned to the guillotine, exclaimed, "O Freedom, what abominations are wrought in thy sacred name!" It was the time of the Revolution in

France. The red-capped mob, having divested itself of all the restraints of authority, was surging through the streets of Paris with the cry, "Liberty, equality, fraternity!" It was the impression of many that the Golden Age of freedom had begun. But presently the gutters ran red with blood and "The Terror" was under way.

A sinner thinks himself free because he can do as he pleases: but to do as one pleases without reference to salutary law is to be in bondage to self and to one's meaner self at that (Rom. 6: 16). The best definition of freedom is that already given, "perfect obedience to perfect law." A Christian is free according to law: that is, free to do right; and anything more than that is merely license to go wrong. Wherefore, "he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman" (1 Cor. 7: 22).

The man who boasts of his freedom to go wrong is usually a bonds slave of habit without knowing it. The Prodigal in the swine-field, so far from being free, was bound hand and foot "to a citizen of that country." His freedom began when he resolved to cut loose from his hard master and assert his freedom in filial love. So Jesus says, "If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." And Paul, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

obey it in the lusts thereof: neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid! Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye *were* the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6: 12-17).

THE FATTED CALF

It was customary in the entertainment of an honored guest to serve a firstling of the flock, which had been kept and fostered for such an occasion (Gen. 18: 7; also 1 Sam. 28: 24). It is evident, in the case of the returned Prodigal, that his father thought the best none too good for him.

A great surprise awaits the redeemed in heaven, as it is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2: 9). We have all dreamed

“GRACE ABOUNDING”

dreams and seen entrancing visions of the Celestial Country; but what must it be to be there? Our amazement when we find ourselves in heaven will be like that of the Queen of Sheba who, when the riches of Solomon's kingdom were shown her, was moved to say, “I believed not until I came and saw: and behold, the half was not told me!”

And the very best in heaven is for those whom Christ had saved from the penalty and power of sin. The holy angels in their shining seats know nothing of the ineffable joy of forgiveness; they worship the Lord as “chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely” but not as their Saviour. They have not come out of the tribulation of sin and cannot join in the song, “Worthy art thou to receive glory, and honor, and dominion and power; for thou hast redeemed us by thy blood!” One of the favorite hymns of long ago begins this way:

*“Ye angels who stand round the throne
And view my Immanuel's face,
In rapturous songs make Him known
And tune your sweet harps to His praise:”*

but the climax of the hymn is reserved for the last verse:

*“Ye saints who stand nearer than they
And cast your bright crowns at His feet,
His grace and His glory display
And all His rich mercy repeat!”*

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

Grace, mercy, and crowns to cast at His feet! The robe of fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints! The signet ring of sonship and co-heirship with the only begotten Son! The sandals of "the Law of Freedom," to be worn by us as ministering spirits in eternal service! A banquet spread with the best of God's good things! And all without money and without price! This for those who continue faithful in labor of love and patience of hope. What more could heart desire?

When Moses, at the end of the wilderness journey, stood on a mountain top and surveyed the Promised Land, "all Naphtali and Ephraim and Judah, even unto the utmost sea," he was not permitted to enter in; but there was something more excellent in store for him. He closed his eyes, and opened them in "a better country, even an heavenly."

*"O could we make our doubts remove,
These gloomy doubts that rise,
And see the Canaan that we love,
With unclouded eyes;*

*Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood
Could fright us from the shore!"*

XI
JOY IN HEAVEN

"And they began to be merry."—LUKE 15: 24.

XI

JOY IN HEAVEN

WE are standing in the doorway of the Prodigal's home. What is going on? "Merry-making" is the word: and it is the very word that tells most happily of heaven. In his *Maud* Tennyson gives pathetic expression to a universal longing:

*"Ah Christ, if it were possible
For one short hour to see
The friends we loved, that they might tell
What and where they be!"*

The Scripture gives us a sidelight into their present occupation: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15: 10). By this it appears that the redeemed are entertained in the Father's house as his

GUESTS

No doubt there were people in the neighborhood of the Prodigal's home who, by reason of non-acquaintance with the family or lack of sympathy with the occasion, were absent from the entertainment. The singular phrase "in the pres-

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

ence [*en-opion*, i. e., before the eyes] of the angels " may possibly be accounted for in that way. The angels, never having sinned and having therefore no experiential part in the great salvation, could scarcely be expected to rejoice so cordially over the home-coming of the Prodigal as members of the household and other immediate friends who knew all about it. They are interested onlookers, but cannot be fully-advised partakers of the feast. It is the waiting kinsfolk and neighbors in heaven, those who have been prayerfully and hopefully waiting, whose hearts surrender to rejoicing when the wanderer comes in.

MINISTERING SPIRITS

There is one point, however, at which our translated friends are at one with the angels, to wit, in seeking to save. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister?" There is a blessed truth—not touched upon in the parable—in the doctrine of "guardian angels," concerning which David wrote, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, . . . lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." The Bible is full of such references. Ministering spirits appear to Abraham (Gen. 22: 11); to Jacob (Gen. 28: 12); to Hagar (Gen. 16: 7); to Balaam (Num. 22: 23-35); to Gideon (Judges 6: 11); to Manoah's wife (Judges 13: 3-20); to Elijah (1 Kings 19: 5); to Zechariah

(Zech. 1: 4) and to many others. They foretell the Incarnation, make known the wonderful event when due, attend on the ministry of Jesus, succor Him after His Temptation in the Wilderness and in the Garden of Gethsemane, hover over His Cross in legions, roll away the stone from His sepulchre and announce His Resurrection. They appear to Peter (Acts 12: 8); to Paul (Acts 27: 23); to Philip (Acts 1: 26); to Cornelius (Acts 10: 7); to John (Rev. 1).

In the conversation of Jesus with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration He gives us to understand that the spirits of just men made perfect are in a closer relation to mundane affairs than is generally supposed. Here were two men, Moses and Elijah, who had lived five hundred years apart and had been dead more than a thousand years; yet they knew each other and felt a mutual interest in the earthly work of Jesus. They had come all the way from heaven to minister to Him when the shadow of the Cross fell over Him, as dark and cold as a winter's night; "they spake of the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9: 31). The inference is inevitable that they, while in heaven, had known what was occurring and about to occur on earth; and more, that they were under commission to assist in some of its important events. Our loved ones in heaven are likewise of those who are "sent

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

forth to minister for such as shall be heirs of salvation." They are "sent": and—unlike Christians on earth—when sent they always go.

We are thus warranted in believing not only that there are parents in heaven watching and waiting, like Monica on the shores of Africa, to hail the home-coming of their wayward children; but that there is a common interest among all the "neighbors" there in our welfare and a general rejoicing over every conversion that occurs. This is set forth in the complementary parable of the Shepherd who, on bringing the lost sheep back to the fold, "callet together his friends and neighbors" to rejoice with him.

THE FESTAL CIRCLE

Ask the Prodigal now if he is happier than he was amid the dissipations of the Far Country. My friend Mike Hickey, who found Christ after spending twenty years in Sing Sing, tells me that he finds more joy in a single night of service among the down-and-outs on the Bowery than in all the thirty years of his previous life of lawless indulgence. No true Christian can be a hypochondriac. "Rejoice in the Lord; and again I say, rejoice! Rejoice always!" Why not, when one has come forth out of darkness into light?

Ask the "neighbors" if they are enjoying themselves. Years ago, when the *Central America* went

JOY IN HEAVEN

down just outside New York Harbor, the people were gathered at the Battery and, as the rescuing boats came in, hailed them with joy, passing the word around, "Five men saved!" "Ten more saved!" Pure and blessed unselfishness that, like the greetings of the neighbors in the Prodigal's home. And our Lord tells us that heaven rejoices in like manner when the redeemed come in, "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads."

But what shall we say of the father's happiness, as he sat at table in the old home and looked on the son for whose return he had been praying and hoping through the years? So does our Father in heaven rejoice over every sinner that repenteth. And so does our Elder Brother rejoice when He "sees of the fruit of the travail of his soul;" for it was He that, sent of the Father, came on a long journey from heaven to earth to seek and save. And at what a cost He found us!

*"Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way
That mark out the mountain's track?"*

*"They were shed for one who had gone astray
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back."*

"Rejoice with me!" Heaven rings with mutual felicitation. Angels and saints triumphant, friends, neighbors, members of the great family which in heaven and earth is one, all rejoice together over the one who was dead but is alive again, who was lost and is found.

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

I like to think of heaven that way. But why not have a foretaste of heaven here and now? Let us rule out the selfish merry-making of the world, the laughter which is as the crackling of the thorns, and ring in the joy of those who keep company with God.

I'm glad you are saved, my friends; let me rejoice with you. Join hands with us in the family circle everywhere and let the loving-cup go round!

*"Sing to the Lord a joyful song
Lift up your hearts, your voices raise;
To us God's gracious gifts belong,
To Him our songs of love and praise.*

*For life below, with all its bliss,
And for that life, more pure and high,
That inner life, which over this,
Shall ever shine and never die!"*

The Church will thus rejoice when we live as ministers of mercy and witnesses for Christ, self-forgetful in seeking to save. There is no joy so like the joy of heaven as the rejoicing of a life-saver on earth. And there is no reward like his; as it is written, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."

The ministry of the humble pastor in the village of Anworth was unattended by any visible fruits. He was repeatedly urged to seek a larger and more

JOY IN HEAVEN

important parish but declined, from a deep sense of responsibility for the few sheep over whom God had made him shepherd. His years were spent in earnest prayer for them: and he left his great ambition on record in these words:

*" Oh, if one soul from Anworth
Meet me at God's right hand,
My heaven will be two heavens
In Immanuel's Land."*

Yet never while he lived was a single sheaf harvested. The grass had not grown over his grave, however, before the ingathering began, and it has continued unto this day. Many, many souls from Anworth and elsewhere have met the saintly Samuel Rutherford "at God's right hand" to join him in the merry-making of redeeming grace.

We are accustomed to think of heaven as "a happy land, far far away:" but heaven, if we are ever to enjoy it, must have its beginning here. "The milk and honey," says an old writer, "are beyond the wilderness." But not all. Now if ever, "are ye the sons of God." There is no heaven, either here or beyond, for selfish souls. There is no feast for those who eat their bread alone. To weep in prayer for those who weep in sin,—and to rejoice with them that, returning from the Far Country, make merry in the Father's house—this is to anticipate glory and share in the felicity of heaven here and now.

XII

THE ELDER SON

“Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”

—LUKE 15: 25-32.

XII

THE ELDER SON

ONE could almost wish that the story had ended without this sad *addendum*. But the Elder son is always in evidence; and the Golden Parable would not be complete without him. Observe, he was

A DUTIFUL SON

No doubt he was sincere in saying, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment;" but what of it? Was anything less to be expected of him? (Luke 17: 10). His wayward brother in going to the Far Country had not only left him in sole enjoyment of the home-life but in exclusive possession of the remainder of the estate. What more could he ask?

AT ODDS WITH HIS FATHER

On being informed by a servant of the occasion of the merry-making, he is rudely jarred out of his self-complacency. His violated sense of justice rises up in angry protest against his father's invidious treatment of the wastrel: "Despite my

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

faithful service thou never gavest me even a kid wherewith to make merry: but as soon as this thy son was come, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

AT ODDS WITH HIS BROTHER

He acknowledges no kinship with the Prodigal; but refers to him contemptuously as "this, *thy son*, which hath devoured thy living with harlots." Hard words these; and a true echo of the world's charity. When a man's down, hold him there until he's down and *out*. "Alas for the rarity of charity under the sun!"

AT ODDS WITH HIMSELF

The man, moreover, is standing in his own light. He has come down through the centuries, with an angry, envious face pressed against the window of his father's house, and refusing to go in. How much wiser, from the mere selfish point of view, had he entered and taken part in the festivities. The music and merry-making were his for the taking: but the father had need to come out and entreat him, and he entreated him in vain. "He would not go in."

AFAR OFF

In his gloomy isolation, self-centered, hopelessly alone and entrenched in angry censoriousness, he

THE ELDER SON

was really further away from his father's house than ever his spendthrift brother was when in the Far Country feeding swine.

It is a lamentable thing to be out of harmony with divine grace. There is more hope for the chief of sinners who knows his fault than for the most respectable of the self-righteous; because while the one may repent and be saved, the other, being unconscious of sin, is confident that he "needeth no repentance." As between the self-satisfied Pharisee and the sin-convicted publican we have the testimony of Jesus that "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other:" and the reason is plain to see. It was, I think, the old poet Quarles who put it thus:

*"Two went to pray: or rather say,
One went to brag, the other went to pray;
One step't up close and looked on high,
While t'other scarce dared lift his eye;
One nearer to the altar trod,
The other nearer to the altar's God."*

PHARISAISM

Be it remembered that this parable was addressed to the Pharisees, who were the religious leaders of their time. Their constant complaint against Jesus was that he "was the friend of publicans and sinners," while they themselves were the most re-

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

spectable members of the Jewish Church. They were not only scrupulous in their observance of things commanded but as to many things not commanded, such as semi-weekly fasts, tithes of garden herbs and the like. Yet the fiercest lightnings that ever flashed from the lips of Jesus were directed at them: "Woe unto you mask wearers; whited sepulchres, fair without but within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness—making long prayers for a pretense and rattling your coins in corban to be seen of men—how shall ye escape the judgment of hell!" This to proud church-going moralists who deemed themselves to be righteous and despised others.

There are church members still who draw aside from reformed inebriates, and from the woman with a past as she anoints her Saviour's feet. She may be God's repentant daughter but the proprieties must be observed. Let us be honest with ourselves. "There is so much bad in the best of us and so much good in the worst of us" that no professing Christian can afford to put on any superior airs. It was this very spirit of caste in the churches of his time that moved Robert Burns to write in bitterness of soul:

*"O ye wha are sae guid yoursel'
Sae pious and sae holy,
Ye've nought to do but mark and tell
Your neebor's fauts and folly:—*

THE ELDER SON

*Ye see your state wi' theirs compared,
And shudder at the niffer;
But cast a moment's fair regard,
What makes the mighty differ?*

*"Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman;
Though each may gang a kennin' wrang,
To step aside is human.
One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving why they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far perhaps they rue it.*

*"Who made the heart, 'tis He alone
Decidedly can try us;
He knows each chord, its various tone,
Each spring, its various bias:
Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it;
What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted."*

It would be a great mistake, however, to assume that the Pharisees are all members of the Church. There are others—others who look in at the windows like this Elder son, and take umbrage at the rejoicings of grace.

The reason why people join the church is presumably because they realize their dependence on Christ, and the Scriptures, and mutual prayer and all the other "means of grace." Then why should not all come in? Can it be that there are those

who deem themselves good enough as they are, and strong enough to get along without such helps? A bold profession, surely, and not easy to live up to! The fact is that the "good" people are all outside of the Church. Those who are in there do not profess to be good but only trying to be; and believe me, my friend, it is uphill work. If you think otherwise, come in and show us how to do it.

The most unpopular thing the Saviour ever did was when He issued a full and free pardon to a thief who repented *in articulo mortis*. A life spent in lawlessness; a brief acquaintance with Jesus on His cross; the cry of a contrite heart, "Lord, remember me!" and an immediate rolling back of the gates of Paradise to receive him! Is this reasonable? Aye, it is the very sweet reasonableness of the grace of God!

The one thing for which the self-righteous cannot forgive the only begotten Son of God is that He "came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." The religious leaders of His time, clad in the conspicuous garb of a superficial morality, charged Him with being the "friend of sinners"; to whom He replied, "Verily I say unto you that publicans and harlots shall go into the kingdom of heaven before you." The Church as Jesus organized it was made up exclusively of sinners; and so it remains to this day. "We are all John Thompson's bairns." Church members,

THE ELDER SON

like others, are not good but only trying to be good and, incidentally, finding it hard work; sinners, but, blessed be God! sinners saved by grace.

“Whereunto shall I liken the men of this generation?” asked Jesus. “They are like unto children in the market-place, calling one to another, We have piped unto you and ye have not danced, we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented; but wisdom is justified of her children.” Celsus complained that there were almost no members of the “respectable” class in the Early Church; and Paul admitted it, saying, “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

The fundamental doctrine of the Gospel is justification by faith; which Luther characterized as “the *articulum* of a standing or a falling church.” Salvation is not by works but of grace; it is “the free gift of God” on sole condition of faith in His beloved Son. Grace and gratis are cognate words.

The counterpart of divine grace is human charity. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.” Let us rejoice, therefore, to see the wayward coming in. Heaven will be full of those who were once

THE GOLDEN PARABLE

spiritually dead and are alive again, who were lost and are found. Great surprises await us! I wonder if we shall see Abraham there in friendly converse with Jacob "the overreacher"? Or Moses walking along the golden streets with Bathsheba's old friend? Or John the Divine kneeling beside the penitent thief? Or if we shall find ourselves at table *vis-à-vis* with Rahab the harlot? If so, it would perhaps be well to think twice before withholding our charity from those who are here partakers with us of the mercy of God.

There is no limit to pardoning grace. "Him that cometh unto me," the Saviour said, "I will *in no wise* cast out." But the sinner must come. So long as he feels no need of a Saviour, relying on his personal merit instead of "the righteousness which is of God by faith," he is self-excluded from the Kingdom of heaven: for, as Paul says, "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal. 2: 21; cf. Phil. 3: 7-14).

A certain ruler who came to Jesus asking "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" on being reminded of the importance of keeping the commandments, protested that he had "kept them all from his youth up;" whereupon Jesus said, "One thing thou lackest: Go, part with everything that separates thee from a life of true holiness and come and follow me." As a man of good intentions and upright life he was "not far from the

THE ELDER SON

kingdom of God." One step and he would be there! But failing to take that one step he would remain outside the Kingdom of God.

We leave the Prodigal at the banquet in the father's house. "Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth!" And the gates of that happy heaven are thronged with ever-increasing numbers of repentant and believing sinners who straightway lend their voices to a chorus like the sound of many waters, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive honor, and glory, and dominion and power for ever and ever!"

"What are these arrayed in white robes and whence came they? . . . And he said to me, These are they which have come out of tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat: for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

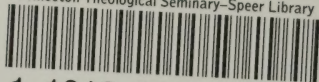
Printed in the United States of America

DATE DUE

~~JUN 20 1996~~			
~~FEB 6 1996~~ JAN 10 1996			
~~DEC 12 1995~~			
~~DEC 12 1995~~			
~~NOV 12 1995~~			
~~AUG 7 1995~~			
~~FEB 1 1995~~			
~~MAR 1 1995~~			
~~OCT 5 1994~~			
~~NOV 30 1994~~			
~~MAY 24 1994~~			
~~MAR 31 1994~~			
~~MAY 28 1993~~			
~~APR 13 1992~~			
~~MAY 10 1992~~			
~~DEC 28 1991~~			
GAYLORD			PRINTED IN U.S.A.

BS2418 .B969
The golden parable;

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00012 9082